

COMMUNICATIONS

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*June 23/20*

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IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED  
ON THE PHILADELPHIA & READING RAILROAD NEAR  
TREMONT JUNCTION, PA., ON MARCH 23, 1920.

June 7, 1920.

On March 23, 1920, there was a rear-end collision between a passenger train and a freight train on the Philadelphia & Reading railroad near Tremont Junction, Pa., which resulted in the death of 2 employees and the injury of 1 employee. After investigation of this accident the Chief of the Bureau of Safety reports as follows:

This accident occurred on the Lebanon & Tremont Branch, a single-track line extending from Lebanon, Pa., to Brookside, Pa., a distance of 43 miles. Trains are operated by time-table and train orders; trains in the same direction are spaced 5 minutes apart at open telegraph offices; flags are used for this purpose, a red flag indicating that a train has passed within 5 minutes, a green flag indicating that a train has passed more than 5 minutes but less than 10 minutes previously, and a white flag indicating that the last train passed 10 or more minutes previously; the corresponding indications are stop, proceed with caution, and proceed.

The accident occurred at a point about 1,800 feet south of Tremont Junction. Approaching this point from the south there are several curves and short tangents, followed by a reverse curve of 5° 30', extending to the right a distance of 366 feet and then to the left a distance of 1,325 feet, followed by 320 feet of tangent to the point of collision. The view is materially obscured on account of the track on the curve being laid in a

out. The grade averages about .5 per cent ascending for a distance of about one half mile. The weather was clear at the time of the accident.

Northbound freight train extra 1068, en route from Cressona to Brookside, was in charge of Conductor Gilbert and Engineman Heber and consisted of engine 1068, 12 freight cars, and a caboose. At 8.45 a. m. this train left Lorberry Junction, the last station south of the point of accident and about 3.5 miles distant therefrom, and at about 9.30 a. m., while running at a speed of 10 or 15 miles an hour, the rear end of this train was struck by train No. 30.

Northbound passenger train No. 30 was in charge of Conductor Manwiller and Engineman Lendenberger, and consisted of engine 547, 1 combination mail and baggage car, and 2 coaches. This train left Lorberry Junction at 9.25 a. m., 11 minutes late, and was traveling at a speed estimated to have been 40 or 45 miles an hour when it collided with the rear end of extra 1068.

The underframe of the caboose of extra 1068 was forced under the front of engine 547 and the superstructure was totally destroyed. Both pairs of wheels of the caboose came to rest under the front of the engine, the engine truck was forced back against the driving wheels and the two pairs of driving wheels were derailed. The end of a coal car ahead of the caboose was also damaged but no other damage was sustained by either of the trains. The employees killed were Conductor Gilbert and Brakeman Zimmerman, who were riding in the caboose.

After its departure from Lorberry Junction extra 1068 was considerably delayed on account of the engine slipping, and

the engineman got off the engine and walked beside it for a short distance while knocking on the sand pipes for the purpose of starting the sand. The evidence indicated that when extra 1068 reached a point about 3/4 mile south of the point of accident it began to increase speed and that it was running at a speed of from 10 to 15 miles an hour when the accident occurred. No whistle signal had been sounded for the flagman to protect the rear of the train.

During the period that the train had been running at reduced speed Flagman Spitzner had not taken any measures for the protection of his train other than to stand on the rear platform of the caboose or in the doorway, when the train was some distance south of where the accident occurred. He looked at his watch on several occasions, the last time being at 9:17 a. m., at which time train no. 30 was 3 minutes overdue at Lorberry Junction. Although he realized that his train was then occupying the track on the time of train No. 30, Flagman Spitzner said he did not get off to put down any torpedoes because he thought he would be able to see train no. 30 approaching in time to get off and protect his train. As the train was rounding the curve he went into the caboose, obtained a red flag, talked a little with one of the men in the caboose, and then from his position in the doorway saw train No. 30 approaching. He waved his red flag and then dropped it, called to the men in the caboose, and jumped. Conductor Gilbert was dozing in the caboose, and paying no attention to the operation of his train.

At Lorberry Junction a white flag was displayed for train

No. 30, and after leaving that point the train made up a little of the lost time. As the engine entered the curve immediately south of the point of accident the engineman, whose cab on this type of engine is over the center of the boiler, turned to look at the water-glass. When he again looked ahead he saw the caboose of extra 1068 and at once placed the brake valve in the emergency position but found that the brakes had already been applied. The caboose was about 100 feet distant when the engineman first saw it and at about this time he saw the flagman come out of the door, without a flag, and jump. The fireman of train No. 30 who from his position on the inside of the curve, had seen the caboose when it was distant about the length of his train, ran to the opposite side of his cab and applied the air brakes in emergency.

This accident was caused by the failure of Flagman Spitzner properly to protect his train, and by the failure of Conductor Gilbert to see that his train was properly protected when being delayed and occupying the track on the time of a superior train.

Rule 99 of the Rules of the Operating Department of this railroad reads as follows:

"When a train stops or is delayed, under circumstances in which it may be overtaken by another train, the flagman must go back immediately with stop signals a sufficient distance to insure full protection. When recalled, he may return to his train, first placing two (2) torpedoes on the rail when the conditions require it.

"The front of a train must be protected in the same way, when necessary, by the front brakeman, or in his absence, by the fireman."

Fireman Spitzner was thoroughly familiar with this rule; he knew that his train was occupying the track on the time of a

superior train, that it was running at a rate of speed which placed it in danger of being overtaken, and that the view around the curve was obscured. Under these circumstances he was extremely negligent in failing to take prompt measures to protect his train instead of waiting until train No. 30 actually appeared in sight.

Rules 1002 and 1012, under the heading of "Rules for Conductors," read as follows:

1002. "They will be responsible for the movement, safety and proper care of the train, in strict accordance with the rules, special instructions and orders, and for the faithful and prompt performance of duty by the trainmen."

1012. "If for any cause the train moves at a slower rate of speed than usual, they must take such immediate action as may be necessary to protect it against following trains."

Rule 1049, under the heading "Special Instructions to Freight Conductors," reads in part as follows:

1049. "When a train is in motion, they will take a position that will give a full view of the train, and see that the brakemen properly perform their duties, and the flagman goes back promptly when the rules of safety so require; also keep a sharp lookout, especially when rounding curves."

The evidence indicates that Conductor Gilbert was asleep in the caboose. Had he been on the alert, and had Flagman Spitzner properly protected the train when it was in danger of being overtaken by another train, this accident could have been avoided.

Flagman Spitzner was employed as a coal brakeman in

August, 1912, and was promoted to coal flagman in November, 1916. Conductor Gilbert entered the service as office boy in March, 1883. He served in various capacities and began his first train service as brakeman in November, 1895. Since then he had served in the capacities of brakeman, weigh-master, yard-master and conductor, having been promoted to the last mentioned position in January, 1911. The records of both of these employees were good.

At the time of the accident the engine crew of extra 1068 had been on duty about 8 hours and 30 minutes after an off-duty period of about 8 hours, while the conductor, brakeman and flagman had been on duty about 8 hours after an off-duty period of 8 hours and 30 minutes. The engine crew of train No. 30 had been on duty about 4 hours and 37 minutes after about 9 hours off duty.

Had an adequate block system been in use on this line, the accident would no doubt have been prevented.