

IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED AT THE  
CROSSING OF THE SEABOARD AIR LINE RAILWAY AND THE CEN-  
TRAL OF GEORGIA RAILWAY NEAR SAVANNAH, GA., ON FEBRUARY  
8, 1921.

March 11, 1921.

On February 8, 1921, there was a side collision between a Seaboard Air Line passenger train and a cut of cars of the Central of Georgia Railway, within the yard limits of Savannah, Ga., resulting in the death of 1 employee and the injury of 13 passengers. After investigation of this accident, the Chief of the Bureau of Safety reports as follows:

Location.

The East Carolina division of the Seaboard Air Line Railway, on which this accident occurred, is a single-track line extending between Hamlet, N. C., and Savannah, Ga., a distance of 262 miles, over which trains are operated by time-table and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. At the point of accident this line is crossed at grade by the tracks of the Central of Georgia Railway. That part of the Central of Georgia terminal involved is a 3-track line, the tracks from north to south being known as track 1, the westbound main track, and the eastbound main track; these tracks are connected with the Seaboard main line by means of two interchange tracks located northwest of the crossing of the main lines of the two roads. The switches connecting interchange tracks 1 and 2 with Central of Georgia track 1 are located 524 and 607 feet, respectively, west of the crossing. In the vicinity of the point of accident track 1, on which the Central of Georgia cars involved were moving, is straight and practically level. Approaching the point of accident from the north on the Seaboard, there is a tangent about 2,250 feet in length, followed by a 1-degree curve to the left 350 feet long and a tangent extending beyond the point of accident, about 250 feet distant; the grade is slightly descending toward the crossing. No interlocking or mechanical devices are provided at this crossing, but stop boards are located on the right side of the tracks of each railway about 50 feet from the crossing; all trains are required by state law to come to a full stop within 50 feet of all railroad crossings at grade not protected by mechanical devices. The weather at the time was clear.

Description.

Southbound Seaboard Air Line passenger train No. 25, consisting of 1 baggage car and 2 coaches, all of wooden construction, hauled by engine 681, in charge of Conductor

Howe and Engineman Butt, was en route from Hamlet to Savannah. It passed Pritchard, the last open telegraph office, 17 miles from Savannah, at 9.42 p.m., 50 minutes late, and at about 10.15 p.m., while crossing the Central of Georgia tracks at Savannah at a speed variously estimated at from 2 to 15 miles an hour, the side of the rear coach was struck by a cut of cars being switched on Central of Georgia track 1.

Central of Georgia yard engine 1155, in charge of Foreman Swain and Engineman Langsdale, moved a cut of 15 cars from interchange track 1 to Central of Georgia track 1, the engine being on the west end of the cut. The engineman then received a signal from a switchman and backed up a short distance, the 10 cars on the east end were cut off before the engine came to a stop, and they rolled to the Seaboard crossing at a speed of 4 or 5 miles an hour, striking the rear coach of train No. 25.

The coach was overturned, but the coupling held and the coach was dragged about 85 feet before the train was brought to a stop by an application of the air brakes; the train line was not broken, and it was not determined what caused the air brakes to apply. The running gear and the sides of the coach were badly damaged. The box car which struck it was derailed and somewhat damaged. The employee killed was the flagman of train No. 25.

#### Summary of evidence.

According to Engineman Butt, of train No. 25, he stopped at the crossing and sounded two blasts on the whistle. At about the same time he looked toward the west and saw some cars on Central of Georgia track 1, about 150 and 200 feet from the crossing; there was no light on these cars and he thought they were standing. He then started his train and moved over the crossing at a speed of about 2 miles an hour. The first knowledge he had of anything wrong was when the air brakes were applied. While the statements of other employees on the train varied slightly as to its speed in passing over the crossing all of them, as well as seven of the passengers, verified the statement of the engineman about stopping at the crossing, while several of these witnesses also said that they heard the whistle sounded twice.

Foreman Swain, in charge of the crew working with Central of Georgia switch engine 1155, had instructed the crew to take 15 cars out on track 1, and he told Switchman Anderson to cut off 10 cars on that track, switch one car to the interchange track, cut off three more on track 1 and then return with the remaining car to the interchange track, where Foreman Swain remained checking cars, being

about 40 car-lengths from the crossing when the accident occurred. When issuing these instructions, he said nothing about fouling the Seaboard track. Switchman Anderson, however, thought Foreman Swain would protect the crossing and gave the signal to kick the 10 cars eastward toward the crossing, Switchman Lowther cutting off the 10 cars from the balance of the cars being handled by the switch engine. At this time Switchman Anderson was about 1 car-length east of Switchman Lowther and about 12 car-lengths from the crossing. Just after the cars were cut off, Switchman Anderson saw the engine of train No. 25 passing over the crossing at a speed estimated by him to have been 12 or 15 miles an hour; he estimated the speed of the cut of cars at about 3 or 4 miles an hour. There was no light on this cut of cars and no switchman riding on the leading car. Although Switchman Anderson had only had 6 months' experience as a switchman, he was familiar with the conditions existing in this vicinity and knew that the state law requires all trains to come to a full stop within 50 feet of railroad crossings at grade. Switchman Lowther knew nothing about any arrangements made for the protection of the crossing. None of the members of the switch crew were able to say positively whether train No. 25 stopped for the crossing, although some of them thought it had not done so.

Rule 98 in the book of operating rules of each railway provides in part that trains shall approach railroad crossings at grade prepared to stop unless the switches and signals are right and the track is clear, also that where required by law they shall come to a stop. The state law covering this point reads in part as follows:

"Whenever the tracks of separate and independent railroads cross each other in this State, all engine-drivers and conductors must cause the trains which they respectively drive and conduct to come to a full stop within fifty feet of the place of crossing, and then to move forward slowly."

#### Conclusions.

This accident was caused by the failure of the crew of Central of Georgia switch engine 1155 to comply with the rule and state law requiring trains to be brought to a stop before passing over railroad crossings at grade.

While the weight of evidence indicates that train No. 25 of the Seaboard Air Line Railway was brought to a stop before passing over the crossing, it is clear that the Central of Georgia crew paid no attention to the requirements of the state law or of rule 98, previously

referred to, or to the stop boards located approximately 50 feet from the crossing; furthermore, there was no switchman riding on the leading car. Switchman Anderson was in charge of the particular movement being made and is principally responsible for the occurrence of this accident, although Foreman Swain, who had issued the instructions concerning the cars to be switched, must have known that such a movement would cause the cut of cars to approach the crossing and should have warned the members of the crew to take necessary precautions.

With the exception of Switchman Anderson, who had been employed as a switchman for 6 months and had had no previous experience, all of the employees involved were experienced men. At the time of the accident the crew of switch engine 1155 had been on duty about 6 hours, previous to which Switchman Anderson had been off duty 9 hours and the other members of the crew 16 hours. With the exception of Baggage-master Madden, who had been on duty about 14½ hours, after 13 hours off duty, the crew of train No. 25 had been on duty 13 hours, after more than 14 hours off duty.