

INV. 336

March 28, 1916.

IN RE INVESTIGATION OF ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
SEABOARD AIR LINE RAILWAY NEAR SYDNEY, FLA.,
FEBRUARY 6, 1916.

On February 6, 1916, there was a head-and collision between a passenger train and an extra freight train on the Seaboard Air Line Railway, near Sydney, Fla., which resulted in the injury of 7 passengers and 6 employees. After investigation of this accident, the Chief of the Division of Safety submits the following report:

The Tampa District of the Florida Division, on which this accident occurred, is a single track line. The movement of trains is governed by time-table and train orders transmitted by telephone, no block signal system being in use. The collision occurred on a curve of two degrees, 913 feet in length, at a point about 300 feet south of its northern end. This curve leads to the right for southbound trains. Approaching the curve from the north the track is tangent for three or four miles, while approaching from the south it is tangent for about one mile. The track on the curve is on a fill of about six feet and the view is obscured by woods on the inside of the curve. The weather was clear.

Southbound passenger train No. 25, en route from Venice, Fla., to Tampa, Fla., consisted of one mail and baggage car, one express car, two coaches and one Pullman car, all of wooden construction, hauled by locomotive 183, and was in charge of Conductor McKeen and Engineman King. It left Venice, on the Sarasota branch,

at 12:10 p.m., as train No. 502. It arrived at Turkey Creek, on the main line, at 3:55 p.m., and left that point as train No. 25 at 4:00 p.m., on time. It left Sydney at 4:07 p.m., 3 minutes late, and collided with northbound extra 747 at about 4:11 p.m., while running at a speed estimated to have been about 25 miles an hour.

Northbound freight train extra 747 consisted of a caboose hauled by locomotives 747 and 588, and was in charge of Conductor Dearmine and Enginemen Phifer and Hunter. It had orders to proceed to Plant City, the first station north of Turkey Creek, to pick up a train of phosphate. Extra 747 left Tampa at 3:40 p.m., passed Brandon, the last open telegraph office, at about 4:04 p.m., and collided with train No. 25 about four miles beyond Brandon while running at a speed estimated to have been about 25 miles per hour.

The locomotive of the passenger train was badly damaged, while the body of the combination mail and baggage car was torn from the trucks and practically demolished, as was the body of the express car. The first locomotive of the extra was considerably damaged and slight damage was sustained by the second locomotive. The fact that there was no loss of life was undoubtedly due to the fact that all three engine crews jumped, while there was no one in the first two cars of the passenger train when the collision occurred.

Engineman Phifer, in charge of locomotive 747, the leading locomotive of the extra, stated that he compared watches with the conductor just before leaving Tampa, and it was then

3:29 p.m. The conductor gave him two train orders on form 31. He did not check the register personally, but stated that the conductor had the numbers of the trains written on the back of the clearance card, and he called off to the operator the numbers of the trains without looking at his time-table. No mention was made of train No. 25, and he stated that he never thought of that train until he saw it approaching, just before the collision. After leaving Tampa he looked at his time-table, and was figuring where to go for train No. 3, a southbound passenger train; he had his mind on meeting that train and entirely overlooked train No. 25.

Conductor Dearline stated that when checking the register before leaving Tampa, he had forgotten to bring his time-table with him, and checked the register against the trains as he remembered them, and then called out to the operator the numbers of the trains he had checked, and asked if that was all. He admitted that this was not a proper way to check a train register. He then went to the locomotives, gave the orders and clearance card to the engineman of the second locomotive, but did not compare watches with him. He then went to the leading locomotive and read the orders to Engineman Phifer and compared watches with him. The extra then started, and when approaching Brandon he looked at his time-table, looking up the time of train No. 3, and again failed to notice train No. 25. The first warning he had of that train was when a conductor who was deadheading in the caboose called to him to look out.

Engineman Hunter, in charge of the second locomotive of extra 747, stated that the conductor gave him copies of the

orders and then proceeded to the leading locomotive. He stated that he looked over the orders carefully, and then saw the conductor and the engineman of the leading locomotive standing on the ground reading the orders. When they had finished the conductor gave a signal to proceed. Engineman Hunter further stated that at no time did he look at his watch, neither did he compare time with the conductor, or check the train register. At Yeoman, 13 miles from Turkey Creek, he thought about train No. 25 and looked at his watch. According to his time it was then 3:35 or 3:40 p.m., and he figured that the extra had time enough to go to Turkey Creek for train No. 25. Shortly afterward he felt the air-brakes being applied, but the collision occurred before he had an opportunity to jump from the engine. Engineman Hunter further stated that it was not until the next day that he discovered that his watch was wrong. He stated that he usually wound his watch in the morning at 5:00 o'clock, but on the date of the accident he did not wind it until about noon, and that he did not look at it to see what time it was until his train passed Yeoman. When asked why he did not compare watches with the conductor he stated that he failed to do so on account of having full confidence in the efficiency of the other engine crew, this same reason also applying to his failure to read over the orders to the conductor. On the morning after the accident he compared watches with other employees and his own watch was eighteen minutes slow. He supposed that it had run down & stopped a few minutes before he wound it at noon the day of the accident. Although required by the rules to compare watches with the standard clock before leaving the terminal, and also to compare watches with

his conductor, he did not do so in this case, and stated that he did not always compare with the standard clock.

This accident was caused by the crew in charge of extra 747 overlooking train No. 23, for which Conductor Dearmine and Enginemen Phifer and Hunter were responsible. Conductor Dearmine and Enginemen Phifer admit that they overlooked train No. 23, while Enginemen Hunter stated that he did not overlook that train, but did not compare his watch for the purpose of seeing whether or not it was correct, and depended entirely upon the conductor and the enginemen of the leading engine for the safe operation of the train.

The rules require that enginemen and conductors check the train register before leaving the terminal, for the purpose of ascertaining whether or not all opposing superior trains which are due have arrived, and had this rule been complied with by any of the three employees at fault their attention would undoubtedly have been attracted to train No. 23, and the accident would not have occurred.

Conductor Dearmine was employed as a conductor on March 1, 1911; Enginemen Phifer was employed as enginemen in switching service in 1904, and was made an enginemen in main line service in 1906; Enginemen Hunter was employed as enginemen in switching service in 1911, and worked both in main line and switching service. All of these men had good records and had been on duty 1 hour and 10 minutes after periods off duty of 8 hours in the case of Conductor Dearmine and Enginemen Phifer, and over 20 hours in the case of Enginemen Hunter.