

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE SOUTHERN RAILWAY NEAR STOCKBRIDGE, GA., ON AUGUST 17, 1926.

October 6, 1926.

To the Commission:

On August 17, 1926, there was a head-end collision between a work train and a wrecking train on the Southern Railway near Stockbridge, Ga., resulting in the death of one employee and the injury of five employees.

Location and method of operation.

This accident occurred on that part of the Atlanta Division extending between Inman, Ga., and Macon, Ga., a distance of 93.6 miles; in the vicinity of the point of accident, this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table, train orders and a manual block signal system.

Stockbridge is located about 24 miles south of Inman; at this point the main track extends north and south and there are two passing sidings, the north siding 3,692 feet in length paralleling the main track on the east and the south siding, 4,896 feet in length paralleling it on the west. The south end of the north siding and the north end of the south siding overlap each other about 300 feet. The station and telegraph office is located on the west side of the main line nearly opposite the north switch to the south passing siding. The employees refer to these two sidings at Stockbridge as the North and South laps. The collision occurred on the main track between the switches of the south siding, at a point approximately 1,850 feet south of the station. Approaching from the north, beginning at Stockbridge station the track is tangent for 850 feet followed by a compound curve to the left 1,210 feet in length, the maximum curvature of which is $5^{\circ} 19'$ and the minimum $4^{\circ} .01'$, the point of accident being 260 feet from the southern end of this curve. Following the curve the track is tangent for 3,340 feet. There is a descending grade of 1.6% for southbound trains. There is a bank 14 to 18 feet high on the east side of the track which limits the view at the point of accident to about 150 feet.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 1.00 p.m.

Description

On the day of the accident work extra 200, in charge of Conductor Powell and Engineman Wilson, was assigned to bridge construction service and was engaged in loading bridge material at Big Cotton Indian Trestle, about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles south of Stockbridge and held train orders permitting it and seven other engines to work between Constitution, Ga., and Spring St. Ga., practically the entire line between Iamson and Macon, and which required it to protect against first, second, third class and extra trains. It was being protected in both directions by flagmen, one stationed at Big Cotton Indian Trestle and one at Stockbridge, the latter with written flagging instructions on Form 896 issued by Conductor Powell at 10.00 a.m. reading:

"To Flagman Griffith of work extra 200,
Hold all trains at Stockbridge until
work extra 200 arrives. Work extra 200
will clear at south end of south lap when
called. Work extra 200 will clear first
class trains at Stockbridge."

About noon work extra 200 returned to Stockbridge and entered the north siding to clear first class passenger trains Nos. 48 and 28 which passed there at 12.12 and 12.32, respectively. While at Stockbridge Conductor Powell was informed by the supervisor in charge of the work, that on account of the congestion of trains, no more work would be attempted at Big Cotton Indian that afternoon and told him to take his train to South River Bridge, several miles north of Stockbridge and work there. Before going to South River Bridge, however, it was necessary for work extra 200 to return to Big Cotton Indian and get the flagman who had been left there to protect against northbound trains. A few minutes after the two passenger trains had passed, work extra 200 departed from Stockbridge, went to Big Cotton Indian, picked up the flagman and was returning to Stockbridge and was running at a speed variously estimated to have been between 6 and 30 miles per hour when it collided with southbound extra 6571. At the time locomotive 200 was headed south and was hauling two empty flat cars, the balance of the train having been left on the north siding at Stockbridge.

Southbound extra 6571, in charge of Conductor Wasden and Engineman Smith, consisted of wrecking equipment as follows: sleeping car, dining car, tool car, boom car,

steam derrick, truck car and caboose in the order named. It left Inman at 10.15 a.m. arriving at Stockbridge at 12.54 p.m. where it was flagged and stopped by Flagman Griffith near the north end of the station and given flagging instructions. After receiving a train order and a clearance card conferring permissive rights to the block it departed from Stockbridge at 12.57 p.m. and about three minutes later while running at a speed estimated to have been between 5 and 8 miles per hour collided with work extra 200.

None of the equipment was derailed. The force of the impact drove the tender of engine 200 into the cab against the boiler head and bending the back end of the locomotive frame. The tender frame and cistern were badly damaged. The front end of engine 6571 was considerably damaged and end sills on several cars in its train was damaged. The employee who was killed was the fireman of engine 200.

Summary of evidence

Conductor Powell, of work extra 200 stated that during the morning he had been working with his train at Big Cotton Indian, south of Stockbridge, before he left Stockbridge he gave Flagman Griffith flagging instructions on Form 896 to hold all trains at Stockbridge, that work extra 200 would clear at south end of south lap when called. When his train left to return to Big Cotton Indian to get the flagman after letting the passenger trains pass, he told Flagman Griffith to hold all trains at south switch to north lap until his train returned, that they were coming back into the north lap for his train, at that time it was his intention that Flagman Griffith disregard the written instructions and be governed by his later verbal instructions. The reason he did not take up the original written instructions and issue new instructions in writing was because he was in a hurry and wanted to get down there and back as quick as he could. He said that he had been cautioned within 60 days about the importance of giving written flagging instructions. It did not occur to him that there might be any confusion. Conductor Powell further stated that in returning to get his flagman he took the two flat cars with him to save switching but he did not have the air brakes on them coupled because both of his flagmen were busy. He estimates the speed of his train to have been 12 to 14 miles per hour at the time of the accident.

Engineman Wilson of work extra 200 stated that when they started work from Stockbridge on the day of the accident Flagman Griffith was given written instructions on form 896 and those instructions were being used until the train returned to Stockbridge to allow trains Nos. 48 and 28 to pass. Before work extra 200 returned to Big Cotton Indian for the flagman, he heard Conductor Powell tell Flagman Griffith a couple of times, that upon their return they "would clear in south end of north lap where we left our train," and Griffith replied that he understood, he supposed that Griffith had also been given written instructions. It was his understanding that Flagman Griffith would flag and hold all trains at the south switch of the north lap until work extra 200 returned. While he had always been shown the written instructions given to flagmen, he had never been furnished with a copy.

He estimates the speed of this train at the time of the accident was 9 or 10 miles per hour, he is unable to form an opinion as to the speed of extra 6571 as they were only about a car length away when he first saw them. He immediately made an emergency application of the brake and tried to close his throttle. He believes that his train ought to have stopped a little quicker if the air brakes on the two cars had been coupled up.

Flagman Griffith stated that before departing from Stockbridge in the morning Conductor Powell told him that work extra 200 was going down to Big Cotton Indian to load some piles, and in addition to the written instructions given him told him to hold all trains at Stockbridge until they returned, that they would clear the south switch of the south lap when called in, and that they would clear all first class trains at Stockbridge. It was his understanding from the verbal conversation he was to allow second class and inferior trains to proceed down the main line to the south switch of the south lap where they would call in work extra 200, except that in case work extra 200 was not at Stockbridge in clear at the time passenger trains were due at Flappen (the first station, 5.5 miles south of Stockbridge) that he would not let anything go south of Stockbridge until it arrived either on the south lap or on the main line.

He stated that when work extra 200 returned about noon and after trains Nos. 48 and 28 had passed, Conductor Powell told him work extra 200 was going to follow extras 799 and 160 south, back to Big Cotton Indian, pick up the flagman left there and was then coming back up the main line to Stockbridge, and for him to hold everything until it returned including extra 845 south, but that he could let the latter

train go down the south lap to the south end if he wanted to. There was no question in his mind as to where he was to hold trains under the verbal flagging instructions, he was to hold them clear of the south switch of the north lap. He cannot say why Conductor Powell did not cancel the original written instructions and issue new ones, he knew that the verbal instructions were new instructions and canceled the former written instructions.

He got on the engine of extra 845 and showed his written instructions to Engineman Christian, also repeated his verbal instructions to him, but Engineman Christian refused to sign the written instructions, intimating that in view of the verbal instructions the written instructions were no good. He then got off the engine and started to go back to flag extra 6571 which was approaching. He stopped extra 6571, climbed upon the engine and presented his written instructions to the engineer and told him that Conductor Powell had given verbal instructions that work extra 200 was going back to pick up their flagman and was coming back up the main line in a few minutes, and for him to hold all trains there until it arrived. He then got off the engine and walked back a few steps to where Conductor Wasden and Trainmaster Griffith (who was riding on extra 6571) were standing and showed them the written instructions and also told them Conductor Powell had left verbal instructions to hold all trains at Stockbridge until work extra 200 returned, as it had gone back to pick up its flagman and would be coming back up the main line in a few minutes, but if they wanted to go any farther they could go down the south lap as extra 845 was then in south end of south lap. When he told Conductor Wasden and Trainmaster Griffith the verbal instructions and showed them the written instructions Trainmaster Griffith said, "According to this he (work extra 200) has no right this side of south switch of the south lap on the main line. Go ahead and if he comes up there it is up to him." After extra 6571 started he noticed that they were going down the main line. He then got on the car with Trainmaster Griffith and told them that Conductor Powell had said he was coming up the main line in a few minutes. In view of this he did not see why he should try and stop extra 6571 again.

The reason he gave extra 6571 the original written instructions when he had received later verbal instructions canceling them was because extra 6571 had permission to allow them to go down the south lap and he thought that if he did not give them the original written instructions they might

go down the south lap and head out on the main line, and if they hit anything they could come back and say they did not have any verbal instructions.

He had not been in the habit of taking verbal flagging instructions except when it is necessary to take them over the telephone, and he did not understand that in such cases the rules require him to reduce such instructions to writing.

Engincer Smith of southbound extra 6571 stated that when his train arrived at Stockbridge Flagman Griffith got on the engine and showed him the written flagging instructions and said Conductor Powell instructed him to hold all trains at Stockbridge. He read the instructions over three times before he signed them to make sure that he understood them and handed them back to Griffith who got off the engine and went back to where Conductor Wasden and Trainmaster Griffith were standing. He saw both of them reading the instructions and heard Flagman Griffith say something about holding all trains at Stockbridge. Trainmaster Griffith after reading the instructions remarked to Conductor Wasden, "Let's go down to the south end of the south switch and call in extra 200." He (Smith) understood from the written instructions together with what Flagman Griffith told him that the work train was going to clear at the south switch of the south lap, and that his train was perfectly safe in going to the south switch of the south lap. He did not see the work extra approaching until someone shouted, "Look out!" It was then about half a car length distant. He made an emergency application of the brakes and reversed his engine, and his train was nearly stopped at the time of the collision.

Conductor Wasden of southbound extra 6571 stated that after his train arrived at Stockbridge, Flagman Griffith got off the engine and came to where he and Trainmaster Griffith were standing and showed them the written instructions and said Conductor Powell had instructed him to hold everything at Stockbridge but that he did not know what Conductor Powell meant by it. Trainmaster Griffith asked for the written instructions again and asked Flagman Griffith if those were instructions, to which the flagman replied, "Yes!" Trainmaster Griffith then said, "We will proceed down to south switch to south lap and call him in." So far as he (Conductor Wasden) was concerned the written instructions were all that was to govern him and he understood his train was to be held at the south switch of the south lap. He estimated the speed of his train at the time of the collision as about 5 or 6 miles an hour, while that of work extra 200 was at least 25 miles an hour.

Trainmaster Griffith, who was riding extra 6571 south, stated that after that train stopped at Stockbridge, Flagman Griffith dropped off the engine and came up to where he and Conductor Wasden were standing, and handed him the flagging instructions, written on Form 896. After reading the instructions he asked Flagman Griffith if that was all he had. Flagman Griffith replied that Conductor Powell had told him to hold all trains there until work extra 200 returned. He then read the order the second time and handed it back to Flagman Griffith and said to Conductor Wasden, "We will pull down to the south lap switch and call him in." He then got on the rear of the sleeping car, which was next to the engine, and the train departed. He saw Flagman Griffith standing on the ground when the rear of the coach passed him but he did not see him get on the train after it started to move. When Flagman Griffith told him Conductor Powell had said to hold all trains there until work extra 200 returned, he understood that to mean at the south lap of the south switch, the same as the written instructions. If the written instructions were not meant to be complied with they should not have been presented. He does not recall that Flagman Griffith stated that, "The work train would be coming up the main line in a few minutes."

Agent-Operator H. H. Patton at Stockbridge stated that he saw Flagman Griffith get upon engine 845 and later get off. In a few minutes Griffith came up to the telegraph office and said he wanted to report Engineer Christian, of extra 845, because he (Christian) refused to sign the flagging instructions and would go down and hit the work extra, they were trying to get his job. He (Patton) told Flagman Griffith he had better go and flag the approaching southbound extra. After extra 6571 arrived Flagman Griffith came up and handed the instructions to Conductor Wasden and he in turn handed them to Trainmaster Griffith. He heard them read them and they were to the effect that extra 200 was to head in at south end of south lap when called in. He thought the flagman was excited as he said something about heading in the south end of the north lap. Trainmaster Griffith asked for his instructions a second time and he heard Trainmaster Griffith say, "Pull down and stop this side of the switch and blow them in." After Trainmaster Griffith said they would pull down on the main track to south switch of south lap and call in work extra 200, Flagman Griffith remarked, "He said head in south end of north lap." He (Patton) supposed Flagman Griffith was talking about Conductor Powell.

Engineer Christian of extra 845 stated that he heard Conductor Powell give his instructions to Flagman Griffith to hold everything at north lap, later he started to pull his own train in to the south lap and wait until the work

extra returned. In the meantime Flagman Griffith called him and handed him his instructions and wanted him to sign them. He would not sign and told Flagman Griffith that if he did he would have the right to back out and go down the main line to south switch of the south lap. As he understood the instructions his train was to stay in clear on the passing track until the work extra returned. Flagman Griffith swung off the engine, then came back and got on it again and again asked him to sign the instructions. He refused the second time and told Griffith the instructions were canceled and that he would get in trouble if he used them. He told Griffith to use his verbal instructions.

Conductor Suddeth of extra 845 stated that he heard Conductor Powell of work extra 200 tell Flagman Griffith, "I am through working at Big Cotton Indian Crestle. I am going after my flag and will come back in here, going into north lap on my train. You hold everything here until I get back. I will come back in here." From that he understood that the work train was coming back up the main line into the north lap. He was on engine 845 when Flagman Griffith got on and heard Engineman Christian tell him his instructions were canceled, that they were no good.

Flagman Sumner of extra 845 stated that he was standing near Flagman Griffith, Trainmaster Griffith and Conductor Wasden and heard Flagman Griffith tell Conductor Wasden and Trainmaster Griffith that Conductor Powell instructed him to hold all trains at Stockbridge until work extra 200 arrived. Trainmaster Griffith was reading the order and he said to Wasden, "This order reads, 'Will clear at south end of south lap when called in'", and Flagman Griffith said something about "to hold them at Stockbridge until they arrive." Trainmaster Griffith then said, "Go down the main line and call them in at south lap. If they hit it will be up to him." He further stated that he heard slight remarks which caused him to believe that this might be an unsafe movement. He asked Engineer Smith where he wanted to be buried, to which Smith replied, "I will not be on the engine when they hit."

Flagman M. H. Smith of work extra BC 7 stated that as extra 6571 was pulling out he heard Flagman Sumner say to Engineer Smith, "Where do you want to be buried?" Engineman Smith made some kind of answer but he did not understand it.

Brakeman Kennedy of extra 6571 stated that he was standing in the gangway with Engineer Smith on extra 6571 when Sumner asked him where he wanted to be buried, but he did not hear Engineer Smith make any reply.

Conclusions

Rule 1251 of the rules of the operation department of the Southern Railway under the heading "Conductors in Freight Service" is as follows:

They must furnish their flagmen with written instructions, those to hold designated trains at a specified point on Form 896; or for trains to look out for work train at a designated point on Form 895. They must send to the trainmaster copies of all Forms 895 and 896 issued.

This accident was caused by the failure of Conductor Powell of work extra 200 to fully comply with the above rule. In this instance he gave his flagman written instructions which properly protected his train up until the time it came to Stockbridge to allow superior trains 48 and 28 to pass, then when it became necessary to change the plan of work he issued verbal flagging instructions to Flagman Griffith without canceling the written instructions this resulted in a misunderstanding on the part of extra 6571 as to what instructions were in effect.

Flagman Griffith also shares in the responsibility for this accident. From his own statement he fully understood that work extra 200 expected to return on the main track and take the siding at the south switch of the north siding and that southbound extra 6571 should not have gone beyond that point. When he saw that extra 6571 was pulling out on the main track he should have insisted that they remain clear of the south switch to the north siding and taken any action necessary to prevent them from proceeding on the main track.

The record contains some evidence that there may have been some doubt on the part of Trainmaster Griffith, Conductor Wasden and Engineman Smith of extra 6571 as to the meaning of the written and verbal instructions given to Flagman Griffith by Conductor Powell. It should have occurred to them that there might be a conflict between the written and the verbal instructions and rather than rely entirely upon the written instructions they should have adopted the safe course and been governed by rule 107 which reads:

In all cases of doubt or uncertainty the safe course must be taken.

Complying with this rule, under the circumstances, extra 6571 should have waited at Stockbridge station clear of the south switch to the north siding until it was definitely ascertained

where work extra 200 was going, or to have sent a flagman ahead before proceeding to the south switch of the south siding.

It is noted the air brakes were not coupled on the two cars in work extra 200. Had these brakes been in operation it is possible that work extra 200 might have stopped in a shorter distance.

All of the employees involved were experienced men. At the time of the accident Conductor Powell had been on duty 6 hours and 30 minutes prior to which he had been off duty 10 hours.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director.