

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
ST. LOUIS-SOUTHWESTERN RAILWAY NEAR IDALIA, MO.,
ON JANUARY 30, 1930.

March 4, 1930

To the Commission:

On January 30, 1930, there was a rear-end collision between a freight train and a passenger train on the St. Louis-Southwestern Railway near Idalia, Mo., which resulted in the death of one employee.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Illmo Subdivision of the Northern Division, which extends between Illmo, Mo., and Jonesboro, Ark., a distance of 131.32 miles, and in the vicinity of the point of accident is a double-track line over which trains are operated by time-table and train orders, no clock-signal system being in use. The point of accident was on the southbound track, 2.69 miles south of Idalia, approaching this point from the south the track is tangent for a distance of more than 7,000 feet, followed by a 2° curve to the right which is 2,353 feet in length, the accident occurring on this curve at a point 170 feet south of its leaving end. The grade is descending for northbound trains for a distance of about 2,000 feet, being 0.33 per cent at the point of accident.

The double-track section on which this accident occurred extends between Dexter Junction and Idalia, a distance of 6.23 miles. The switches at each end of this double-track section are hand-operated, and their normal position is for southbound movements, and it is the practice, when there are no conflicting movements to interfere, to operate northbound trains against the current of traffic, in order to avoid delay in handling the switches.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 1.16 a.m.

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Description

Missouri Pacific northbound second-class freight train third No. 46 consisted of 83 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 1412, and was in charge of Conductor Heiligman and Engineman Laurent. At Dexter Junction, 3.54 miles south of the point of accident, the crew in charge of this train received, among others, a copy of train order No. 2, Form 19, reading as follows:

"Third 46 and No 2 have
right over opposing trains
on southward track Dexter
Junction to Idalia."

Train third No. 46 departed from Dexter Junction at 12.40 a.m., running on the southbound track, and was brought to a stop about half way between Dexter Junction and Idalia, on account of a break-in-two resulting from a carrier iron having come down on one of the cars. Repairs had been completed, the train recoupled, and they were about to proceed when the rear end of the train was struck by train No. 2.

St. Louis-Southwestern northbound passenger train No. 2 consisted of two baggage cars, one combination mail and express car, two coaches, one club car and two Pullman sleeping cars, hauled by engine 660, and was in charge of Conductor Glimpse and Engineman English. This train passed Dexter Junction at 1.07 a.m., on time, having received a copy of train order No. 2, previously mentioned, proceeded on the southbound track, and collided with the rear end of train third No. 46 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 15 and 20 miles per hour.

The caboose of train third No. 46 was demolished, and the wreckage destroyed by fire, while the five cars immediately ahead of it were derailed and more or less damaged. Engine 660, of train No. 2, remained upright with all wheels derailed, and was not badly damaged, while none of the cars in this train was derailed. The employee killed was the conductor of train third No. 46.

Summary of evidence

Flagman Gourley, of train third No. 46, said Conductor Heiligman read the copy of train order No. 2, received at Dexter Junction, and that when the train came to a stop on account of the break-in-two, at 12.48 a.m., the conductor said he would look out for the rear of the train and for Flagman Gourley to go ahead and see what was wrong. Flagman Gourley did as he was instructed, but

first mentioned to the conductor that the caboose was standing on a curve and that train No. 2 was due out of Dexter Junction at 1.05 a.m. On reaching a point near the middle of the train, Flagman Gourley found that a carrier iron had come down and, in company with the head brakeman, he made the necessary repairs, signalled the engineman to back the head portion of the train, and the train was then coupled up preparatory to proceeding. After this had been done, Flagman Gourley started toward the rear of his train, but he had not proceeded more than five car-lengths before the collision occurred. Flagman Gourley further stated that he had heard train No. 2 sound a road crossing whistle signal and had seen fire flying from the wheels when it was within three or four telegraph poles of the rear of his own train. It further appeared from the flagman's statements that Conductor Heiligman had appeared to be in normal condition and was at all times fully able to perform his duties as a conductor. When the flagman left the caboose, however, preparatory to going ahead, the conductor was still sitting in the cupola, making no preparations to protect the train. It was at this time that Flagman Gourley noticed that the cupola light was burning and showing red to the rear, which was also the case with the outside marker, but he was unable to state definitely whether the inside marker was showing red or green to the rear.

Engineman Laurent, of train third No. 46, said his train was moving at a speed of about 25 miles per hour when it broke in two, and that he at once sounded the "train parted" signal, he then whistled out a flag as soon as his train had come to a stop, and sent the fireman ahead to protect trains on the other track while the head brakemen went back along the train to ascertain what was wrong. The train had been recoupled, at 1.12 a.m., and the air was being pumped up when the collision occurred, at 1.16 a.m. Engineman Laurent also stated that when starting around the curve to the right on which the accident occurred, he had looked back and noticed that the markers were burning on the caboose, as well as the caboose deck light, but at the point where his engine was standing after coupling up, he could not see the rear of the train, because his engine then was part way around a curve to the left. It further appeared that Engineman Laurent had talked with Conductor Heiligman when starting the trip, and at that time the conductor had appeared to be in normal condition.

Fireman Atkins said that when he was recalled and had returned to his engine, he saw the marker on the left or west side showing green to the front, and he also saw fire flying from the wheels of train No. 2 just prior to

the occurrence of the accident. His other statements, as well as those of Head Brakeman Shaver, generally corroborated the statements of the enginemen.

Engineman English, of train No. 2, said he received a copy of train order No. 3 at Dexter Junction, that his train passed that point at 7.09 a.m., and that when from two to four telegraph poles from the rear of train third No. 43 he saw the dim outline of an obstruction and at about the same time saw two dull red markers and also a red light below them, which might have been a lantern hanging on the caboose door. He did not think the cupola light was burning or else he would have noticed it. The speed of his train at this time was from 40 to 45 miles per hour, and he at once applied the air brakes in emergency, shut off steam, and opened the sanders, and he estimated the speed of his train had been reduced to 15 or 20 miles per hour by the time the accident occurred. No torpedoes or fuses had been encountered, nor had he been flagged at any point between Dexter Junction and the point of accident, while the door of the caboose was closed and there were no signs of any one in or around it. Engineman English also stated that the headlight on his engine was burning properly, and that the air brakes were in good working order, and he did not think the fact that both markers were showing red to the rear caused him to believe that the freight train was on the northbound track, instead of being ahead of him on the southbound track.

Fireman Tisdale, of train No. 2, who rode on the fireman's seat box from Dexter Junction to the point of accident, said there were no torpedoes or fuses displayed in any way, and his first knowledge of anything wrong was when the engineman called a warning and at the same time applied the brakes in emergency. Fireman Tisdale saw the markers on the caboose showing red to the rear, but did not notice any other light, nor did he see any one in or around the caboose. The statements of Conductor Glimpse and of the other members of the crew of train No. 2 developed nothing of importance.

Operator Ishmall, on duty in the yard office at Paragould when Conductor Heiligman's train left that point, said that the conductor appeared to be in normal physical condition and that he knew of no reason why he should not have made the trip in question.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by failure to provide proper flag protection when standing on the main track on the time of a following superior train.

The evidence indicated that Conductor Heiligman had read the order directing his train and also train No. 2 to run against the current of traffic from Dexter Junction to Idalia, and that it was customary for such reverse movements to be made whenever possible in order to avoid delay resulting from handling the switches at each end of the short section of double track. The flagman said that when the train broke in two, the conductor told him to go ahead and see what was wrong, it being the intention of the conductor to look out for the rear end of the train itself, instead of being protected, however, the train was allowed to stand on the main track for a total period of approximately 28 minutes without any torpedoes or fuses having been put down, and without any attempt on the part of Conductor Heiligman, who apparently had remained in the caboose all the time, either to give any kind of a stop signal to the approaching train or to get out of the caboose in time to save his own life. Under these circumstances, no definite explanation can be advanced to explain what occurred.

All the employees involved were experienced men, and at the time of the accident none of them had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law.

Respectfully submitted,

W.P. BORLAND,

Director.