

## INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE  
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE  
ST. LOUIS-SAN FRANCISCO RAILWAY AT OSCEOLA, ARK.,  
ON DECEMBER 25, 1925.

February 20, 1926.

To the Commission:

On December 25, 1925, there was a rear-end collision between two freight trains on the St. Louis-San Francisco Railway at Osceola, Ark., resulting in the death of one employee and the injury of four employees.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Chaffee Sub-division of the River Division, extending between Chaffee, Mo., and Turrell, Ark., a distance of 139.5 miles; in the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. The accident occurred on the main track at a point 3,863 feet south of the depot at Osceola, within yard limits, approaching this point from the south the track is tangent for approximately 3 miles, while the grade is practically level. The view of the point of accident is entirely unobstructed.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 5.10 a.m.

Description

Northbound freight train extra 732 consisted of 51 cars and a caboosc, hauled by engine 732, and was in charge of Conductor Owens and Engineman Slaughter. At Turrell, 29.3 miles south of Osceola, the crew received among others a copy of train order No. 7, Form 19, reading in part as follows:

"Eng 732 \*\*\* run extra Turrell to  
Hayti ahead of No 832 \*\*\*."

Hayti is 70.5 miles north of Turrell. Extra 732 departed from Turrell at 2.22 a.m. and arrived at Osceola at 4.26 a.m., according to the train sheet, at which point work was performed, this work had just been completed and the train was preparing to depart when its rear end, which was standing at a point 1,818 feet north of the south yard-limit board, was struck by train No. 832.

Northbound second-class freight train No. 832 consisted of 33 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 1284, and was in charge of Conductor Montgomery and Engineman Hibner. At Turrell this crew also received among others a copy of train order No. 7, previously quoted, the train departing from this point at 3.50 a.m., and while traveling at a speed variously estimated to have been between 15 and 30 miles an hour it collided with the rear end of extra 732 at Osceola.

The caboose of extra 732 was practically destroyed, while four cars in this train were derailed and damaged, one of them being demolished. Engine 1284 came to rest on its left side, east of and practically at right angles to the track, about 165 feet north of the point of accident, one car in train No. 832 was derailed, but remained upright. The employee killed was the engineman of train No. 832.

#### Summary of evidence

Fireman Felden, of train No. 832, said the air brakes worked properly en route and that he noticed nothing unusual as to the condition of Engineman Hibner. At Wilson, 10.6 miles south of Osceola, Engineman Hibner told him they would take on water at Luxora, 4.8 miles north of Osceola, this was the last conversation he had with the engineman. Approaching Osceola, Fireman Felden was putting in a fire and he said that the engineman was sitting on the seat box, upright, with his left hand on the brake valve and he apparently was maintaining a lookout; he also said that the engine whistle was sounded for road crossings, although he did not recall the station whistle signal having been sounded. On reaching a point south of the yard-limit board the speed was reduced from about 25 miles an hour to about 15 or 20 miles an hour, and the first indication Fireman Felden had of anything wrong was on noticing that Engineman Hibner and Head Brakeman Horn were excited about something. The fireman started toward his own side of the engine, at which time the engineman applied the air brakes in emergency and left his seat box, and on looking out through the front window of the cab the fireman saw the caboose of extra 732, the left marker burning brightly. Fireman Felden thought the first reduction in speed was made at a point 1/2 mile south of where the accident occurred, but that the distance between

where the emergency application was made and the point of accident was not over two car-lengths.

Head Brakeman Horn, of train No. 832, estimated the speed of his train to have been between 30 and 35 miles an hour approaching Osceola; he was sitting on the seat box on the left side of the cab. After the station whistle signal was sounded for Osceola he crossed over and stood in the gangway, behind the engineman, and on leaning out and looking ahead he plainly saw the caboos of extra 732, by the reflection of the headlight of his engine upon it. It was only a short distance away, whereupon he immediately gave a warning of danger, at which time the engineman was apparently looking out of the front cab-window. He said that Engineman Hibner then looked out of the side window and applied the air brakes in emergency, the accident occurring shortly afterwards. Head Brakeman Horn thought that the caboos of extra 732 could have been seen 25 or 30 car-lengths before he himself actually saw it, had a proper lookout been maintained, but said that instead he had been looking at the ground in an endeavor to locate a high switch stand on the right side of the track. He also said that he noticed nothing unusual about Engineman Hibner.

Conductor Montgomery, of train No. 832, stated that the air brakes had been tested and worked properly en route. About two minutes prior to the accident a 15 or 20-pound brake-pipe reduction was made, south of the south yard-limit board, the brakes were released shortly afterwards, being applied again, in emergency, just before the accident occurred. Conductor Montgomery did not think the speed had been reduced sufficiently to comply with the requirements of the yard-limit rule, but said he was depending on Engineman Hibner to operate the train within the yard limits prepared to stop unless the main track was seen or known to be clear. He estimated the speed to have been about 15 or 16 miles an hour at the time of the collision. The statements of Middle Brakeman Smiley and Flagman Capshaw developed nothing additional of importance.

The statements of members of the crew of extra 732 were to the effect that the markers on the rear of their caboos were burning brightly just prior to the accident and the first they knew of anything wrong was when the accident occurred. Conductor Owens stated that he was about 30 car-lengths from the caboos of his train at the time of the accident, he had ridden the rear of a cut of cars that were backed on to his train, made the coupling and had just given the engineman a proceed signal when he noticed the headlight of train No. 832, but at the time he supposed that the engineman of that train was operating his train in accordance with the yard-limit rule.

### Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of Engineman Hibner, of train No. 832, to operate his train under proper control within yard limits.

Under the rules all except first-class trains are required to move within yard limits prepared to stop unless the main track is seen or known to be clear. The evidence is to the effect that the markers on the rear end of the caboose of extra 732 were burning brightly just prior to the accident, the caboose was standing at a point 1,818 feet north of the south yard-limit board, the view approaching this point was entirely unobstructed, and the weather was clear; furthermore, the headlight on engine 1284, of train No. 832, was burning brightly, while the air brakes were in proper working order, and information that extra 732 was running ahead of train No. 832 had been given to the crew of that train in train order No. 7. Engineman Hibner apparently was in full possession of his faculties just prior to the accident, and any attempt to explain why he did not maintain a proper lookout and bring his train to a stop would be mere conjecture, had he complied with the yard-limit rule this accident would not have occurred.

The head brakeman of train No. 832 had been employed about four months while the fireman had been employed at two different intervals with an aggregate of about six weeks' service; and either of these employees been men of experience they would have been more subject to criticism for not maintaining a better lookout when entering yard limits.

An adequate automatic train stop or train control device would have prevented this accident.

With the exception of the fireman and head brakeman of train No. 832, the members of the crew of that train were experienced men. At the time of the accident the crew of train No. 832 had been on duty about two and one-half hours and the crew of extra 732 about four and one-half hours, previous to which both crews had been off duty between eight and nine hours.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director.