

In re investigation of an accident which occurred on the St. Louis-San Francisco Railway at Snyder, Okla., September 14, 1917.

November 7, 1917

On September 14, 1917, there was a rear-end collision between two freight trains on the St. Louis-San Francisco Railway at Snyder, Okla., which resulted in the death of one employee and the injury of one employee. After investigation of this accident the Chief of the Bureau of Safety reports as follows:

The Chickasha sub-division on which this accident occurred is a single-track line running east and west over which the movement of trains is governed by time-table and train orders, no form of block signal being in use. At the point of accident and for several miles to the east the track is straight and there is a slight descending grade for westbound trains from a point 6400 feet east of the point of collision.

Extra 714, west, with 26 cars and caboose, in charge of Conductor Woods and Enginemen Bokley, left Oklahoma City at 3.47 p.m. September 13. A gondola in this train containing coal having developed a broken air pipe, was switched to the rear behind the caboose at Taupa, 94.4 miles west of Oklahoma City and was hauled in this position in the train to Snyder, Okla. This train arrived at Snyder, a terminal, at 4.00 a. m. September 14th and was stopped on the main track just east of the S. L. & S. F. Railroad crossing, the rear of the train standing 5,421 feet inside of the yard limit board, at which point the engine was cut loose from the train and put away, the markers were removed, the crew relieved and both brakemen retired in the caboose for sleep. While the train was standing at this location it was struck by extra 713 west, at 5.30 a. m.

Extra 713 west with 20 cars and caboose, left Oklahoma City at 6.10 p. m. September 13, in charge of Conductor Wance and Enginemen Garman. It passed Lawton, Okla., the last open telegraph office, 34.2 miles east of Snyder, at 3.45 a. m. and at 5.30 a. m. collided with the train of extra 714, which had been left standing on the main track at Snyder. At the time of the collision it was dark and day was just beginning to break. The

weather was clear.

The force of the collision bent two front end braces of engine 713 and badly damaged two cars and the caboose of the forward train causing the death of one and injury of the other brakemen who were asleep in the caboose.

Engineman Garman, of extra 713 west, stated that his engine was equipped with an electric headlight, but the light was somewhat out of adjustment, throwing the rays upward instead of straight ahead. He had made an effort to properly adjust it at Chickasha, 23.6 miles east of Snyder, but found it stuck and was unable to correct the trouble. He stated that his train was drifting at a speed of about 15 miles an hour passing the whistling board, located just west of the Snyder yard limit board, having shut off steam at the top of the hill about one mile and a half east of that point, and was moving 6 to 8 miles an hour when he saw the reflection of his headlight on the glass of the caboose ahead of him, at which time he made a service application of the brakes, then observing that the cars were closer than he had thought, he made an emergency application of the brakes and reversed the engine. His train was moving about 6 miles an hour when the collision occurred, the speed having reduced very little, it having developed that the cars were only about 6 car lengths away when he first saw them. Engineman Garman stated further that his understanding of the yard limit rule was that his train should approach such points under control expecting to find the main track obstructed and be ready to stop, and thought that he did so in this instance. He further stated that there was no light on the caboose and that the gondola car on the rear, being lower than the caboose, was not seen, causing him to misjudge the distance.

Conductor Mance, of extra 713, stated that the brakes on his train were all working, having tested them at La Ton. He heard his engineman sound the whistle signal for Snyder station, also the whistle signal for a meeting point at Snyder, and his train was moving about 6 miles an hour at that time. He did not know the collision had occurred until after he had left his caboose and heard the brakemen holler. He thought the stop was made for the railroad crossing and it seemed to him that the brakes had been applied by about two reductions of the air. Conductor Mance stated further that his

train had been approaching yard limits at all points during this trip under control expecting to find cars on the main track and did not think the speed entering this yard was excessive, and thought that the train could have been stopped within the range of vision.

Brakeman Smith, of extra 713, stated that approaching Snyder he was riding on the left side of the engine looking ahead. The electric headlight was burning but the rays of light were shining upward instead of on the track. He saw no deck light burning, but by the reflection of the headlight on the windows he saw the caboose, when about 6 car lengths distant, at which time they were moving about 6 miles an hour and the engineer applied the brakes. The statement of Fireman Brown, of extra 713, was practically the same as that of Brakeman Smith.

Conductor Wood, of extra 718, stated that upon arrival at Snyder he went to the office to register, his engine was cut lo se from the train and the head-end of train was left standing east of the railroad crossing. As he was returning to his caboose to go to bed he saw extra 713 approaching. For this reason when he was within about 26 car lengths of his caboose, he stepped out in the field and saw that the deck light in the top of the cupola of his caboose was burning. He heard extra 713 whistle for the station as well as the meeting point signal approaching Snyder, and saw its headlight burning brightly. He stated that it was customary to leave the train on the main track when told to do so by the yardmaster at Lewton, and at Snyder, but that the deck light of the caboose is always left burning.

Brakeman Ramsey, of extra 718, stated that they arrived at Snyder about 4:10 a. m. and stopped just east of the railroad crossing. He cut the engine off and after putting it away went to the caboose, arriving there about 4:15 a. m. He stated that upon going into the caboose he remarked to Brakeman Williams who was also in the caboose "You did not leave your markers burning did you?" to which Williams replied, "No, but I left the deck light burning." He then felt safe in retiring but did not look to see if the deck light was burning. He stated that after the collision Engineer German told him that the rays of the headlight were focused up, and that the first thing he noticed was the blur of the light on the cupola windows and that he then made a service application of the brakes not realizing that he was so close, but when he came in sight of the coal car he applied all the air.

Yardmaster Dillinger stated that he was in the depot when extra 718 stopped just east of the railroad crossing and as there was no room in the yard for the train, he came out and gave the crew a signal to cut the engine off, relieved the crew and relied upon the yard limit boards to protect the train, except against first-class trains. The train had been standing in the position about one hour and thirty minutes when the collision occurred. About 5 minutes before the accident occurred he noticed the deck light on top of the caboose showing a green light to the front, but between that time and the time of collision he was south of the point of collision, and had no further occasion or opportunity to notice the light. He saw extra 713 approaching and saw sparks fly from under the engine when within 4 or 5 car lengths of the caboose as if the air brakes had been applied about that time.

Engine 713 was equipped with a Pyle National Electric headlight of 1000-candle power. Master Mechanic Wilcox and Headlight Inspector Jones, stated that the headlight was inspected in the presence of Engineman Gorman and found to be in good condition just before leaving the roundhouse at Oklahoma City, and traveling Engineer Hill stated that after the collision the headlight was again inspected and found to be in good condition and no adjustments were necessary.

During the investigation a test to determine the view obtainable was made at the scene of the accident at a corresponding time in the morning with the same kind of equipment, viz: caboose and coal car and an engine equipped with an electric headlight termed "a poor one." The engine was taken back one mile and a quarter to the east from which point a red light in the cupola of the caboose was visible. The cupola light was then extinguished and the reflection of the approaching headlight on the cupola windows of the caboose could be seen 15 car lengths and the full outline of the caboose could be seen 10 car lengths.

Operating rule 93 of the St. Louis-San Francisco Railway reads as follows:

"Within yard limits the main track may be used protecting against first-class trains. Second and third-class and extra trains must move within yard limits prepared to stop, unless the main track is seen or known to be clear."

The interpretation of the operating official and the tacit understanding of the employees, on the division upon which the collision occurred, is that under the above rule cars may be left standing on the main track within yard limits without the protection of lights at night except when first-class trains are due.

The statements of the employees involved are in conflict as to whether or not the deck light on the caboose was burning at the time of the accident, but regardless of whether the light was burning or not, strict compliance with operating rule No. 93 would require that extra 713 move within yard limits prepared to stop, and the responsibility for an accident of this character under these circumstances rests upon the engineman of the approaching train.

The direct cause of this accident was the failure of Engineman Carman properly to observe and obey the rule governing the movement of extra trains within yard limits. His limited range of vision, due, as he claimed, to an improperly adjusted headlight, which could have developed after the train left Oklahoma City, demanded of him a correspondingly increased degree of caution in having his train under complete control within defined yard limits.

Engineman Carman entered the service as fireman in July, 1902, and was promoted to engineman in November, 1905. He was dismissed from the service in April, 1910, for responsibility in connection with a collision, but was reinstated as engineman in August of the same year and had received demerit marks once since that time for responsibility in connection with an accident. At the time of the accident he had been on duty about 13 hours, after a rest period of 8 hours 30 minutes, following a previous tour of duty of 14 hours.

H.C.M.