

February 28, 1913.

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**In re Investigation of Accident on the Texas and Pacific
Railway near Alexandria, Louisiana, on November 23, 1912.**

On November 23, 1912, there was a rear-end collision between a Southern Pacific mixed train and the first and second sections of Texas & Pacific passenger train No. 51, all of which were coupled together, and the third section of Texas & Pacific passenger train No. 51, on the Texas & Pacific Railway near Alexandria, La., resulting in the death of 3 employees and the injury of 2 employees.

After investigation of this accident the Chief Inspector of Safety Appliances reports as follows:

Trains of the Southern Pacific Company running between Lafayette and Alexandria, La., are operated over the lines of the Texas & Pacific Railway Company between Cheneyville and Alexandria, a distance of about 24 miles, and these trains are governed by the rules of the Texas & Pacific Railway Company. Trains on this portion of the road are operated under the timetable and train order system, the block system not being used.

On the evening of November 22, 1912, Southern Pacific mixed train No. 741 arrived at Cheneyville at about ten o'clock, departing as extra No. 614 west, over the Texas & Pacific track, at about 10:20 p.m. Conductor Crouch was in charge of this train which consisted of 24 loaded cars, a caboose and a passenger coach on the rear end of the train. This train was delayed about 3 hours and 45 minutes at LeCompte and Moreland, and at Moreland it was found that the supply of fuel and water on this train was nearly exhausted. The dispatcher was informed of this situation and to avoid switching movements necessary to permit other trains to pass he sent the following message to the crew of this train:

"Extra 61 and 614 West, Moreland:
Go to Alexandria ahead of first and second No. 51."

The first and second sections of west-bound passenger train No. 51 each consisted of a locomotive and a caboose. Conductor Wilson was in charge of the first section and Conductor Younger was in charge of the second section. These two sections arrived at Moreland on November 23rd at 3:00 and 3:10 a.m., respectively. There they were stopped by extra 614, and Conductor Crouch showed Conductor Wilson the message which he had received from the dispatcher and explained the situation. Arrangements were then made between Conductors Crouch and Wilson to have first No. 51 couple on to the rear end of extra 614 and push it to Alexandria. Conductor Wilson told Conductor Younger what had been done and suggested that second 51 assist in pushing extra 614 to Alexandria; at first Conductor Younger refused to do this but later he did couple his train to the rear of first No. 51. These three trains coupled

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together left Moreland at about 3:20 or 3:25 a.m., and proceeded west until they reached a point about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles east of Alexandria passenger station, just east of what is known as Watkins railroad crossing, where at about 3:55 a. m., they were struck by third No. 51.

West-bound passenger train No. 51 runs from New Orleans, La., to Marshall, Texas, leaving New Orleans at 7:00 p.m. On November 22, 1912, this train left New Orleans on time, as No. 51, consisting of an engine, a mail car, a baggage car, a coach, a chair car, and three sleeping cars, one of which was cut off before the accident occurred. Conductor Edwards and Engineman Van Hoes were in charge of this train, which left Addis, a station about 89 miles west of New Orleans, at 12:05 a.m., November 23rd, about one hour late; running from that place as third No. 51 it made approximately running time, passing Moreland at 3:45 a.m., 58 minutes late, and collided at about 3:55 a.m. with second No. 51.

At the place where the accident occurred and for several miles east of that point the track is practically straight and level. The speed of second No. 51 at the time of the accident was about ten miles an hour and of third No. 51 between 20 and 30 miles an hour. On the night of the accident the weather was foggy, the fog lying in streaks or banks. The locomotive hauling third No. 51 was equipped with an electric headlight, but the fog was so dense that the employees on first and second No. 51 did not see the light from it until just before the collision occurred.

Conductor Wilson of first No. 51 stated that when his train was stopped at Moreland by Extra 614 his flagman was sent back to flag second No. 51, and when this was done and second No. 51 was coupled to the rear of his train he believed that he was relieved from further responsibility for flagging.

Conductor Younger of second No. 51 stated that his train was flagged by first No. 51 at Moreland and he found extra 614 partly on the main track and partly on the siding at that place. After the three trains had been coupled together and had left Moreland Conductor Younger dropped a fusee off from his caboose near mile post 187; and a second fusee was dropped off near milepost 191. As the trains reduced speed on approaching Watkins crossing the flagman dropped off from the rear of the train. Conductor Younger stated that the flagman carried a red light, a white light and a burning fusee, and he dropped off seven or eight telegraph poles from the point where the caboose was struck.

Flagman Vicknair stated that after leaving Moreland he stood looking out the rear door of the caboose; that the conductor dropped off a fusee near milepost 187, and as the train began to slow down for the crossing he got off from the rear

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end of the caboose and started back to flag; he carried a red light, a white light and a lighted fusee, three torpedoes being attached to his lantern. When he heard third No. 51 approaching he started to run back and waved his lighted fusee; but he did not receive any response from the engineman and the train passed him at high speed. He stated that he did not use torpedoes as he hardly had time to do so and he thought he ought to get back as far as possible. He thought he was about ten telegraph poles from the point where the collision occurred when third No. 51 passed him.

Conductor Edwards of third No. 51 stated that he noticed an application of the brakes where the engineman usually applied the brakes to stop for the railroad crossing just east of Alexandria. This application was almost immediately followed by an emergency application of the brakes, and he then felt the shock of the collision. He stated that it was very foggy at the time of the accident and he could see a distance of only about one car length.

Engineman Van Bess of third No. 51 stated that his train passed Moreland at 3:45 a.m.; a freight train was standing on the side track at that place and some of the trainmen gave him a signal to proceed; the station signal also indicated clear. He stated that when he got to the usual place for making a stop for Watkins crossing he closed the throttle and started to apply the brakes; just then he saw the caboose of second No. 51 ahead of him and he immediately applied the brakes in emergency and reversed the engine. He also stated that he saw switchlights between Moreland and the point where the accident occurred but he saw no fuses or signals of any other kind. Just before the collision occurred he said he saw one or two men jump from the caboose and wave lighted fuses, but it was then too late to avert the collision. He stated that the fog was heavy at the time of the accident and that it was very dense in some woods through which his train had passed before reaching the point where the accident occurred.

Dispatcher McCullar who was on duty at the time this accident occurred stated that when he was informed of the condition of Extra 614 at Moreland he sent a message to the crew of this train directing that it run ahead of first and second No. 51, but he did not inform the crews of the sections of No. 51 of this movement. He stated that he had already given extra 614 a time order on third and second No. 51, and he expected the first and second sections to be flagged at Moreland.

On this line the speed of passenger trains is limited to 40 miles per hour and the speed of freight trains is limited to 10 miles per hour. The effect, therefore, of running the freight train ahead of the first two sections of No. 51 was to reduce the maximum schedule speed of these sections from 40 miles per hour to 10 miles per hour. Rule No. 99 of the Texas

& Pacific Railway Company reads as follows:

"When a train stops or is delayed under circumstances in which it may be overtaken by another train, the flagman must go back immediately with stop signals a sufficient distance to insure full protection. When recalled, he may return to his train, first placing two torpedoes on the rail when conditions require it."

The primary cause of this accident was the failure of the conductor of second No. 51 to take proper precautions for the protection of his train against third No. 51, knowing that his train would be delayed and that it was followed by a passenger train, the flagman should have been sent back and should have been instructed to remain out until he had flagged third No. 51 and informed the crew of that train of the delay to the preceding trains. Adequate protection was not afforded by fuses as used in this case and by sending back the flagman when the train slowed down for the crossing, particularly in view of the fact that a dense fog prevailed.

Had the flagman placed a torpedo on the rail, the engineer of third No. 51 might have been warned in sufficient time to permit him materially to reduce the speed of his train, if not to bring it to a complete stop, before overtaking second No. 51.

The dispatcher was also at fault for directing extras 61 and 614 to run ahead of the passenger train singly by a message to the crews of the two extra trains. This movement should have been authorized by a train order which should have been addressed to extras 61 and 614 and in addition to all sections of 51 which would be affected by this order.

The railroad company itself is open to censure on account of its inadequate flagging rule. On many railroads the flagging rules are much more explicit than the rule in effect on the Texas & Pacific Railway, which leaves too much to the judgment of the individual flagman; it should be revised so as to contain more explicit and definite instructions, at least to the extent of fixing the minimum distance which a flagman should go back, and should contain a definite requirement for the use of torpedoes and fuses. Furthermore, the investigation disclosed the fact that a number of the employees on the trains involved in this accident had been employed without examination on the rules of this company.

Flagman Vicknair had been in the employ of this company only a few months; he has had some previous experience on other railroads and stated that he had been examined on the rules of one of those roads but had never been examined on the rules of the Texas & Pacific Railway Company. He stated that he had, however, spent an hour and a half or two hours in the instruction car and the rules were explained to him at that time.

Conductor Younger stated that he had had about twelve years'

experience in railroad service and during the past four years he had been employed by the Texas & Pacific Railway. He had been examined on the rules of other railroad companies for which he had worked but not on the rules of the Texas & Pacific Railway. He stated that since entering the service of that company he had been through the instruction car four or five times.

Engineer Van Hees had been in the employ of this company for about 28 years. He stated that he had been examined on the rules of the Texas & Pacific Railway in a class in 1909.

Brakeman Magruder of second No. 51 stated that he had been in the service of the Texas & Pacific Railway about seven months and had never been examined on the rules. He had been called twice but had failed to report in time for examination and he had not been called since.

Flagman Winstead of third No. 51 stated that he had been in the employ of this company about three weeks and that he had had about ten years' experience on other railroads. He was employed as a brakeman and made one trip as a brakeman, but since that time he had been assigned as a flagman. He stated that he did not have a copy of the Texas & Pacific Railway Company's book of rules and had not been examined on these rules nor on the standard rules.

The facts clearly show that the examination of men entering the service of the Texas & Pacific Railway Company is not systematic or thorough. When the company places men in positions of responsibility, without examinations which demonstrate beyond question their fitness for these positions, it cannot evade responsibility for accident resulting from errors or poor judgment of such employees.

The trains of two railroad companies are operated over that portion of the Texas & Pacific Railway on which this accident occurred. It is believed that the traffic on this road is sufficiently dense to require the additional protection which would be provided by an adequate block signal system.