

IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON  
THE TEXAS AND PACIFIC RAILWAY AT ORPHANS HOME,  
TEX. ON JULY 23, 1920.

September 8, 1920

On July 23, 1920, there was a side collision between a passenger train and a freight train on the Texas & Pacific Railway at Orphans Home, Tex., which resulted in the death of 1 employee and the injury of 3 passengers. After investigation of this accident the Chief of the Bureau of Safety reports as follows:

This accident occurred on the Dallas Subdivision of the Eastern Division, a single-track line extending from Longview Junction to Fort Worth, Tex., a distance of 156 miles, over which trains are operated by time-table, train orders transmitted by telephone, and a manual block-signal system. Eastbound trains are superior to westbound trains of the same or inferior class. The accident occurred about 60 feet west of the east switch of the passing track, which is 4,033 feet in length. Approaching the east switch from the east the track is tangent for a distance of 3,662 feet; the grade varies from 1.1 to .5 per cent descending for westbound trains for a distance of 2,700 feet, and is then practically level for a distance of about 500 feet to the passing track switch. From the passing-track switch westward the grade varies from .4 to .9 per cent ascending for westbound trains for over 3,000 feet. At the time of the accident the weather was clear.

Westbound freight train extra 512 consisted of 56 cars and a consist, hauled by engine 512, and was in charge of Conductor Evans and Engineman Whitworth. On the arrival of the train at Forney, 12.9 miles from Orphans Home, the crew received a copy of train order No. 25, form 19 reading as follows.

"No. 23 engine 712 wait at Terrell until 6.45 a.m. Lawrence 6.50 a.m. Forney 7.00 a.m. Mesquite 7.10 a.m."

Extra 512 left Forney at 6.18 a.m. and on arrival at Orphans Home, at about 6.58 a.m., the train was backed into the west end of the passing track at that point in order to allow train No. 23 to pass. On account of a road crossing the passing track at grade the train was uncoupled near the middle in order to clear the crossing. After the train had been standing uncoupled for more than an hour, with its rear end 25 or 30 carlengths from the east switch, the conductor decided to couple the train, in order to be ready to depart after train No. 23 had passed. The head end of the

train was backed over the crossing to make the coupling, but the cars failed to couple, the lock block in the coupler on the head end of the first car of the rear end of the train failing to seat. The impact of the head end of the train caused the rear end consisting of about 30 cars and the caboose to roll down the grade, fouling the main line at the east switch, where it was struck by train No. 3, at the time of the accident the rear end was traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 6 or 8 miles an hour.

Westbound passenger train No. 3, in charge of Conductor Ford and Engineman Tinsley, en route from St. Louis to Fort Worth, consisted of 2 baggage cars, 1 mail car, 1 coach, 1 chair car, 1 diner, and 4 Pullman sleeping cars, in the order named, hauled by engine 372. This train left Longview Junction at 4.30 a.m., 25 minutes late, left Mesquite, the last open telegraph office east of Orphans Home and 4.7 miles distant therefrom, at 8.18 a.m., 34 minutes late, and at about 8.35 a.m. cornered the caboose of extra 512 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been from 25 to 30 miles an hour.

The front end and right side of engine 372 and the right side of the first three cars in train No. 3 were badly damaged, while the fourth car was slightly damaged. None of the equipment in this train was derailed. The caboose and the last car in extra 512 were thrown to the right side of the track and were demolished; the next two cars were not derailed, but were considerably damaged. The employee killed was the fireman of train No. 3.

Engineman Tinsley, of train No. 3, stated that approaching the point of accident he noticed someone flagging him near the passenger platform about 2,000 feet beyond the east switch, but as Orphans Home is a flag stop he assumed that it was a passenger who was giving him stop signals. He saw the rear end of extra 512 on the passing track but thought that it was standing there. His first intimation of danger was when he saw the caboose of extra 512 beginning to foul the main line, his train then being about 200 feet from the switch. He did not see any one around the moving cars. He called to the fireman and applied the air brakes in emergency. He estimated the speed of his train at the time of the accident at about 25 or 30 miles an hour.

Conductor Evans, of extra 512, stated that while the rear brakeman was cutting the road crossing, after backing in on the passing track, he went into the telephone booth and notified the operator at Fair Grounds, 4.3 miles west of Orphans Home, that his train would be into clear on the passing track at about 7.05 a.m. He left the matter of setting hand brakes entirely to the rear brakeman and did not know how many, if any, of the brakes had been set.

He was standing near the head end of the train, about 20 car-lengths from the road crossing, when the attempt was made to couple the train. When he saw the rear portion of his train rolling down the grade he endeavored to overtake it, and when he found that he could not catch up with it, seeing train No. 3 approaching, he began giving stop signals with his hat. He saw Rear Brakeman Barnes on top of the train as it rolled down the hill but was not sure whether the rear brakeman got off the train before the accident occurred.

Rear Brakeman Barnes, of extra 512, stated that after cutting the crossing at Orphans Home passing track he thought the air brakes would hold the cars and left the rear end standing on the grade without setting any hand brakes for a period of 35 or 40 minutes, when he then realized that his train would remain on the passing track longer than he had expected, he set three brakes on the head end of the rear portion. He stated that he inspected the coupler on the first car of the detached portion of the train immediately before the attempt was made to couple the two portions of the train and found it in proper working condition. When the cars failed to couple and the train started rolling down the grade, he got on top of one of the cars and had started to set the brakes on that car when he saw train No. 3 approaching. He stated that he then got down from the car and started toward train No. 3, flagging that train with his hat.

The statements of the engineer, fireman and head brakeman of extra 512 did not bring out any additional information of importance.

This accident was caused by failure to set a sufficient number of hand brakes on the detached portion of the freight train while it was standing on a grade, for which Conductor Evans and Rear Brakeman Barnes are responsible.

Rule 401 and 501 of the Rules of the Transportation Department of this Railroad read as follows:

"401. Conductors must see that sufficient hand brakes are set to hold the cars that they leave on side tracks. When the side track is on a grade, they must, if practicable, couple the cars together, and in addition to setting the brakes, the wheels should be blocked.

"501. In other than their special duties flagmen will be governed by the rules for conductors, brakemen and other employees, so far as they relate in any way to the proper discharge of their duties."

Although his train had been on the passing track

about 1½ hours, Conductor Evans had made no attempt to see if hand brakes had been set on the rear portion of the train, saying that he had confidence in the rear brakeman and therefore assumed that he would attend to this important duty. In view of the fact that he knew train No. 3 was due, the conductor displayed poor judgment in attempting to couple the train at that particular time without knowing positively that enough hand brakes were set to prevent the rear portion from getting beyond their control. Rear Brakeman Barnes remained in the vicinity of the crossing, depending on the air to keep the brakes applied.

All the employees involved in this accident were experienced men with good records. None of them had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law.