

IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED
ON THE UNION PACIFIC RAILROAD NEAR CORLETT
JUNCTION, WYO., ON AUGUST 19, 1920.

September 4, 1920.

On August 19, 1920, there was a rear-end collision between two freight trains on the Union Pacific Railroad near Corlett Junction, Wyo., which resulted in the death of 2 employees. After investigation of this accident the Chief of the Bureau of Safety reports as follows:

This accident occurred on a double-track line over which trains are operated by time-table, train orders, and an automatic block-signal system. The signals are of the two-position, lower-quadrant type, the masts carrying alternate home and distant signals. The signals involved in this accident are home signal 5136, located 2,730 feet east of the junction switch at Corlett Junction; distant signal 5126, located 4,829 feet east of signal 5136, and home signal 5118, located 4,717 feet east of the caution signal. The track is tangent from Corlett Junction to the point of accident, a distance of about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles, with a descending grade for east-bound trains varying from 0.85 to 1.23 per cent. The weather was clear.

Eastbound freight train extra 3616 consisted of 64 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 3616, and was in charge of Conductor Cannon and Engineer McQuilken. Extra 3616 left Corlett Junction at about 4.15 a.m., passed home signal 5136 in the clear position, distant signal 5126 in the caution position, and stopped at home signal 5118, which was in the stop position, the rear end of the train then being 848 feet east of distant signal 5126. The engineer then released the brakes and had just begun to work steam when the brakes were applied as a result of the rear of the train being struck by extra 3604.

Eastbound freight train extra 3604 consisted of engine 3604 and a caboose, in charge of Conductor Talbot and Engineer Brown. It arrived at Corlett Junction over the Colorado Division at about 4.15 a.m. There is no telegraph office at Corlett Junction, and before proceeding out upon the main line at that point it is necessary to obtain permission over the telephone from the main-line dispatcher to use the main line from that point to Cheyenne, a distance of about 4 miles. Conductor Talbot obtained the necessary authority to run over the main line to Cheyenne, Wyo., and after extra 3616 had passed the junction switch, extra 3604 headed out on the main line, at about 4.20 a.m., and came to a stop at home signal 5136, which was displaying a stop indication. Extra 3604 then proceeded, as allowed by the rules, passed distant signal 5126, which was displaying a cau-

tion indication, and collided with the rear end of extra 3616 at about 4.30 a.m.

Slight damage was sustained by engine 3604, while the caboose and two cars of extra 3616 were destroyed and another car damaged. The employees killed were the conductor and flagman of extra 3616.

Enginemen McQuilken, of extra 3616, said he stopped for home signal 5118, released the brakes, and had just started to move when the brakes began to stick and the train stopped. At that time neither he nor the fireman knew that there had been an accident. The engineman thought the train had been stopped not more than 2 or 3 minutes, or about time enough for the brakes to be released, while the fireman thought the train had been stopped about 1 minute. The engineman said no trouble was experienced in starting the train from Corlett Junction and that no delays had been encountered until he received distant signal 5126; he then began to reduce the speed, which had been about 15 or 20 miles an hour, in readiness to stop at home signal 5118.

Engineman Brown, of extra 3604, stated that the markers on the caboose of extra 3616 were burning when it left Corlett Junction, which statement was verified by all the members of the crew of extra 3604. Engineman Brown said that after holding out on the main line and coming to a full stop at home signal 5136, he proceeded slowly, shortly afterwards passing distant signal 5126 in the caution position, at this time he did not see the markers of extra 3616. He realized that extra 3616 was ahead of him and said he was running slowly, looking ahead, but that he did not remember seeing the caboose until he felt what he thought was the breaking of a rod, when he made an emergency application of the air brakes and found that his train had collided with the train ahead. He estimated the speed at the time to have been about 6 miles an hour. Engineman Brown was unable to account for not seeing the rear end of extra 3616, and although he said there was a possibility that he had fallen asleep, still he did not think it possible as he distinctly remembered looking at the water glass and at the fireman within 10 or 15 seconds of the time of the accident. He was more inclined to think that on account of not noticing the markers of extra 3616 he had been under the erroneous impression that that train had passed around the curve near home signal 5118 and that on account of that erroneous impression he was not watching as closely as he should have been.

Fireman Buffington, of extra 3604, was on his seat box looking ahead when passing distant signal 5126, getting down on the deck of the engine just before the accident occurred. He was unable to account for the fact that at no

time had he seen the markers of extra 3616. The conductor and two brakemen of extra 3604 were riding in the caboose at the time of the accident; they estimated that the speed was about 5 or 6 miles an hour.

Conductor Cannon, Flagman Burke, and Head Brakeman Dennington, went off duty at 10.30 a.m., August 18, after having been on duty $7\frac{1}{4}$ hours. According to Brakeman Dennington they then went to a restaurant and returned to their caboose, the flagman and head brakeman going to bed at 11.00 a.m., while the conductor did not go to bed until about noon. At about 3.00 p.m. some other employees came into the caboose and were talking with them, and they finally got up at 4.30 p.m. Brakeman Dennington said that the conductor and flagman then went to another caboose; he then went to eat and returned to his caboose, but did not see the conductor and flagman again until after they were called to go on duty at 8.30 p.m. on the trip on which this accident occurred.

Although the engine crew of extra 3604 did not notice the markers of extra 3616 before the accident occurred, all the members of the crew of extra 3604 saw them when extra 3616 departed from Carlett Junction, at which time they were burning brightly. After the accident the capola light was found to have been demolished, but the two markers were found on the ground, one on each side of the track, and there was oil in each of them. In view of this fact, it is believed that they were burning at the time of the accident, and that for some unknown reason they were not observed by the engine crew of extra 3604.

This accident was caused by the failure of Conductor Cannon and Flagman Burke, of extra 3616, properly to protect their train, and by the failure of Enginemen Brown, of extra 3604, properly to be governed by signal indications and to maintain a proper watch of the track ahead. Fireman Buffington, of extra 3604, knew of the indications of the signals passed by his train, and was on his seat box looking ahead just before the accident occurred. Under these circumstances he must also share in the responsibility for this accident.

Rule 99 of this railroad reads in part as follows:

"When a train is moving under circumstances in which it may be overtaken by another train, the flagman must take such action as may be necessary to insure full protection. By night, or by day when the view is obscured, lighted fuses must be thrown off at proper intervals."

When being brought to a stop at home signal 5118, extra 3616 was in danger of being overtaken by another train,

and a proper regard for safety should have prompted Flagman Burke to throw off a lighted fusee. There is no evidence, however, to indicate that any attempt was made to comply with the rule referred to above. Conductor Cannon undoubtedly was in the caboose with Flagman Burke, the bodies of both men being found in the wreckage of the caboose, and is equally responsible with the flagman for not seeing to it that proper protection was provided. Had either of these employees complied with the rule, it is possible that this accident might have been prevented, in spite of the negligence of the engine crew of extra 3604.

Neither Engineman Brown nor Fireman Buffington was able to offer any definite reason for their failure to see the markers of extra 3616. They had observed the automatic signals displaying the proper indications, and knew that there was another train immediately ahead of them, and in view of the straight track, favorable weather conditions, and the fact that the electric headlight with which their engine was equipped was burning properly, there can be no excuse for their failure to see the markers of extra 3616 in time to avert the accident.

Conductor Cannon was employed as a brakeman in March, 1917, and promoted to conductor in November, 1918. Flagman Burke was employed as a brakeman in July, 1920; he had had previous experience on other railroads. Engineman Brown was employed as a fireman in 1898 and promoted to engineman in 1903. Fireman Buffington was employed as a fireman in 1916. The records of all of these employees were good.

The crew of extra 3616 had been on duty about $8\frac{1}{2}$ hours, previous to which the engine crew had been off duty 8 hours or more and the train crew $9\frac{1}{2}$ hours. The crew of extra 3604 had been on duty about $11\frac{1}{4}$ hours, previous to which Engineman Brown had been off duty about 42 hours, Fireman Buffington about $10\frac{1}{2}$ hours, and the train crew nearly 12 hours.