

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
LINE OF THE UNION TRACTION COMPANY OF INDIANA NEAR
SHARPSVILLE, IND , ON OCTOBER 31, 1928.

December 13, 1928.

To the Commission:

On October 31, 1928, there was a head-end collision between a passenger train and a newspaper train on the line of the Union Traction Company of Indiana near Sharpsville, Ind., which resulted in the death of one employee on duty and one employee off duty, and the injury of two passengers, one person carried under contract and two employees

Location and method of operation -

This accident occurred on that part of the Tipton Division extending between Indianapolis and Kokomo, Ind., a distance of 55.97 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 at a point approximately one-half mile north of Sharpsville, approaching this point from the south the track is tangent for a distance of 1,467.7 feet, followed by a 10° curve to the right 1,133.3 feet in length, the accident occurring on this ~~unimproved~~ curve at a point 826 feet from its southern end. Approaching from the north there is a 10° curve to the right 1,016.7 feet in length and 552.5 feet of tangent, followed by the curve on which the accident occurred. The grade is practically level. Owing to trees and poles adjacent to the track the view of the point of accident from the motorman's compartments of approaching trains is restricted to about 600 feet, although opposing trains can be seen when approximately 1,200 feet apart

The weather was clear and it was daylight at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 6.35 a.m.

Description

Northbound passenger train No. 300 consisted of motor 401, of steel construction, and was in charge of

Conductor Campbell and Motorman Crum. This train is scheduled to run from Indianapolis to Kokomo but is annulled on Sundays from Indianapolis to Tipton, covering only that part of the run from Tipton to Kokomo. It left Tipton, 7.38 miles south of Sharpsville, at 3.20 a.m., on time, and after stopping at Sharpsville it departed from that point at about 3 33 a.m. practically on time and collided with southbound extra 296 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 20 and 30 miles per hour.

Southbound newspaper train extra 296 consisted of motor 296 and trailer 235, both of reinforced wooden construction, and was in charge of Conductor Draper and Motorman Oler. This train departed from Kokomo, 8.03 miles north of Sharpsville, at 6.22 a.m., having only its running orders as an extra, and collided with train No. 300 while traveling at a speed estimated at about 25 miles per hour.

The forward end of motor 401 was telescoped for a distance of about 15 feet while both motor 296 and trailer 235 were considerably damaged by the impact, none of the equipment was derailed. The wreckage caught fire almost immediately, resulting in the destruction of the bodies of motors 401 and 296. The employees killed were the motorman of extra 296, who jumped just before the collision occurred, and a lineman who was burned to death.

Summary of evidence

Motorman Crum, of train No. 300, stated that as his train approached the point of accident he observed the opposing train, with its headlight burning, as soon as it came within range of vision, which he estimated as having been 400 feet. He immediately shut off the power, reversed the motor, and then turned on the power again and jumped from the car, the collision occurring at about the time he struck the ground; he did not apply the brakes as he believed that in reversing the motor he had used the most effective method of reducing speed, and he estimated the speed of his train at the time he first saw the approaching train at 25 to 30 miles per hour, which speed was reduced to between 20 and 25 miles per hour at the time of the accident. Motorman Crum said he had no orders pertaining to extra 296 and was unaware of its existence until he saw it, only a short distance ahead.

Conductor Campbell, of train No. 300, stated that while riding in the rear of the car he felt a jerk which indicated that the motorman had either reversed the motors or applied the air brakes. He then started towards the head end of the car and when within about 10 feet of the door leading to the smoking compartment he saw the motorman start toward the right door of the forward compartment. Conductor Campbell looked ahead and saw the headlight of an approaching train a short distance away, the collision occurring immediately afterwards. He estimated the speed of his train at the time of the accident at about 30 miles per hour. He got off as soon as possible and noticed his motorman pull down the trolley on motor 401 and also noticed that the trolley on motor 296 was off the wire. At about the same time he noticed that the cars were on fire and he re-entered his train, procured a fire extinguisher and attempted to subdue the flames but on account of the smoke he was compelled to abandon this task. He was of the opinion that the cars were ignited by the stoves used for heating purposes, this also was the opinion of Motorman Crum.

Conductor Draper, of extra 296, stated that his train was operated from Indianapolis to Peru on the day of the accident, prior to the return trip on which the accident occurred. Before departing from Peru on the return movement he reported to the dispatcher and received an order to run as extra 296 to Ripple, a station 7.7 miles north of Indianapolis. After both he and the motorman had repeated the order to the dispatcher the train departed, at 4:50 a. m., but on account of insufficient power the train did not arrive at Kokomo until 6:08 a. m., and as a result he again called the dispatcher and inquired if his running order was still in effect, the dispatcher replying in the affirmative, he did not hear the dispatcher mention train No. 300 although this may have been done after he had hung up the telephone receiver. His train then departed from Kokomo and was approaching Sharpsville, traveling at a speed of 25 to 35 miles per hour, when the brakes were applied in emergency, the accident occurring shortly afterwards, he estimated the speed at 20 to 25 miles per hour at the time of the accident. Conductor Draper further stated that he had lost his time-table on the trip from Indianapolis to Peru. Before arriving at Kokomo on the return trip, however, he asked the motorman for permission to consult the latter's time-table but the motorman resented the request and did not produce it, saying "I can see" and at the same time stating that train No. 300 was annulled and that the first train to be met would leave

Tipton at 7.15 a.m. As Conductor Draper had seen the motorman consult his time-table a short time previously and as the motorman was an older man in point of service on the division and should have been better acquainted with train schedules, and in view of the fact that he did not wish to incur the further enmity of the motorman, Conductor Draper accepted the motorman's word, not even making inquiry when talking with the dispatcher after his train reached Kokomo. Conductor Draper said that while he had been employed continuously for the past three years, with two years' previous experience as a motorman and conductor, yet most of this time was spent on another division. He said he had not operated trains over the Tipton Division more than 18 days and had handled the news-paper train only seven or eight times, therefore he was not thoroughly familiar with the time of scheduled trains.

Dispatcher Pumphrey stated that he issued the train order to Conductor Draper and Motorman Oler authorizing them to operate their train as extra 296 from Peru to Ripple, which order was made complete at 4 48 a.m. after both of these employees had repeated it back to him, he held no further conversation with the members of the crew before going off duty. Dispatcher Venable stated that he relieved Dispatcher Pumphrey at 6 a.m. and was advised by him that extra 296 was then between Peru and Kokomo. The conductor of train No. 300 called for orders at 6.15 a.m. and was advised there were no orders for his train, there was no mention made of extra 296. At 6.22 a.m. the conductor of extra 296 called and after some conversation concerning the delay to that train due to lack of power he informed the conductor that his train order was still in effect, and in addition advised him that train No. 300 was on time, which latter information was given as an extra precaution.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the operation of extra 296 against an opposing superior train without authority, for which Conductor Draper and Motorman Oler were responsible.

The rules provide that extra trains must clear the time of regular trains not less than five minutes, unless they have been given a meeting or passing order, or other orders relieving them from this necessity, and no such orders had been issued. According to Conductor Draper he had lost his time-table while en route northward from Indianapolis to Peru, and before arriving at Kokomo on the return trip to Indianapolis he asked Motorman Oler

for permission to consult the latter's time-table but the motorman would not produce it. Conductor Draper did not assert his rights either by stopping the train, which he said he did not know he could do under such circumstances, or by insisting that the time-table be produced. Conductor Draper had the opportunity, however, to obtain the necessary information about opposing trains when communicating with the dispatcher from Kokomo but failed to do so. There was also evidence that Dispatcher Venable called Conductor Draper's attention to train No 300 during the conversation but the conductor denied having heard any reference made to that train.

It is not known what caused Motorman Oler to become confused as to the status of train No 300. The time-table in effect specifically shows this train as scheduled daily between Indianapolis and Kokomo, the fact that it is annulled from Indianapolis to Tipton on Sunday being shown in a footnote. Had the motorman failed to read the footnote he would have known nothing about the annulment of that part of the schedule and would have been prepared to clear its time as shown at the various stations en route. It seems more than probable, therefore, that he misread the footnote and thought either that the schedule was annulled in its entirety or else he confused the points between which the annulment was effective.

On this division there are 28 scheduled first-class trains daily between Indianapolis and Kokomo, as well as 5 second-class trains, one of which is operated daily, 2 daily except Sunday, and 1 daily except Monday. There are also 5 other first-class trains and 1 second-class train operated over various parts of the division. Traffic of this density on a single-track line is amply sufficient to warrant the installation of a block-signal system, and undoubtedly this accident would not have occurred had such a system been in use.

The employees involved were experienced men; at the time of the accident the crew of extra 296 had been on duty 8 hours and 35 minutes after having been off duty for a period of 12 hours. The crew of train No 300 had been on duty for 30 minutes, previous to which they had been off duty for more than 15 hours.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. Borland,

Director.