

Chairman *W. H. Harrison*

RECORDED

4/14/19

APR 14 1919

OFFICE OF

IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE  
WABASH RAILROAD, NEAR PATTONSBURG, MO.,  
ON MARCH 16, 1919.

April 9, 1919.

On March 16, 1919, there was a derailment of a passenger train on the Wabash Railroad near Pattonsburg, Mo., which resulted in the death of 1 employee and the injury of 1 employee. After investigation of this accident, the Chief of the Bureau of Safety submits the following report:

The 18th District of the Western Division, on which this accident occurred, is a single-track line. Trains are operated by time table and train orders, their movements being protected by a manual block<sup>signal</sup> system. Approaching the point of accident from the west, the track is tangent for more than 1 mile. The grade is practically level. The track is laid on a slight embankment, with 80-pound rails, 33 feet in length, single spiked, with 20 untreated oak ties to the rail, ballasted with about 20 inches of gravel and cinders. No tie plates or braces are used.

Eastbound train No. 14 consisted of 6 cars, hauled by engine 628, and was en route from Omaha, Nebr., to St. Louis, Mo., and was in charge of Conductor Mulligan and Engineman Newcomb. It left Stanberry, Mo., a division terminal, about 28 miles from Pattonsburg, on March 15, at 10.51 p. m., 39 minutes late, and continued to lose time between that point and Pattonsburg on account of heavy rainfall and minor wash-outs. It left Pattonsburg at 2.10 a. m., March 16, 3 hours

and 1 minute late, and at 2.25 a.m. was derailed by a wash-out 4.19 miles beyond Pattonsburg, the speed at the time the engine struck the washout being estimated at 5 or 6 miles an hour.

The engine and tender were derailed and turned over to the right. The forward truck of the first car was also derailed and the car tipped slightly to the right. More of the track was afterwards washed out, resulting in the first car turning over, while the second car leaned so far to the right that it was turned over in order to clear the track. The fireman was caught between the engine and tender and killed.

Engineman Newcomb stated that several stops and slow-downs were made between Stanberry and Pattonsburg on account of high water and washouts, the train being flagged by section-men at several points. Just after passing Cypress Creek, about 2,000 feet from the point of derailment, he saw a light in the vicinity of a farmhouse on the left side of the track, but did not pay any attention to it. The speed of his train was about 20 miles an hour when by means of the electric headlight he saw the rails to be out of line, and he at once made an emergency application of the air brakes. He started to get off his seat, but the derailment occurred before he could reach the deck of the engine. He estimated the speed to have been reduced to 5 or 6 miles an hour when the engine was actually derailed and stated that he thought he could see the washout a distance of about two telegraph poles. There was no water running over the rails at that time, and he could not see much water beside the track on his side of the engine. The water

was high on the other side of the track, and if he had known of it he would have run at a lower rate of speed. He thought the fireman was on his seat approaching the point of derailment, but said that the fireman said nothing to him. Engineman Newcomb said that he had run on this district about 2 years, but had never known of the track being washed out at this point and did not anticipate any trouble, although he could see that there had been heavy rains in the vicinity.

Conductor Mulligan stated that in his 18 years' experience as conductor on this district he had never seen any of the track washed out in this vicinity, except on one occasion, although water had been over the track on several occasions. The exception was in 1909, when there was a flood which covered all of the track. He stated that the speed of the train approaching the point of derailment was about 20 miles, possibly 22 miles an hour. The air brakes were suddenly applied in emergency, the derailment occurring shortly thereafter. He had been observing from the right side of the train and had seen no water along the track, but on getting out after the accident, he saw that the water on the left side was up to the ties and was running over the track for a distance of about 60 feet. When returning to Pattonsburg, he met a farmer who said that he had seen the train coming, knew that there was going to be trouble, and had tried to flag it with a lantern. This farmer said that at ~~that~~ the time he tried to stop this train, he was in a field nearby.

Brakeman Hartshorn stated that there was water along the track on the south side all the way from Pattonsburg. He thought the speed was about 20 miles an hour when the brakes were applied, and that it was reduced to about 5 or 6 miles an hour at the time of accident. There was water against the rail but none running over it only when the derailment occurred.

Conductor Nieman, of westbound train No. 3, due to leave Pattonsburg at 5.36 p.m., stated that at the two stations preceding Pattonsburg, Gallatin and Jameson, there was evidence of heavy rains with water running over the track at Gallatin, 16 miles east of Pattonsburg. Between Jameson and Pattonsburg, however, a distance of 9.5 miles, there was no water in the streams.

Engineman Parker of train No. 3 stated that there seemed to be very little water in Cypress Creek at the time his train passed, the creek not being one quarter full.

Night Chief Dispatcher Merrill, on duty at the time of the accident, stated that information about heavy rains had been received during the day. Various orders were issued during the evening, warning all trains of heavy rains and specifying particular points where unusual caution was to be exercised. None of the points mentioned was in the vicinity of the point of derailment. A report was received from the section foreman at Pattonsburg in regard to the track in his section, which included the point of derailment, and he stated that he understood this report showed the track to be in good condition.

Dispatcher Sullivan, on duty from 4.00 p.m. until midnight, stated that the operators at various offices reported heavy rainfall, but no report was received of any serious trouble up to the time he went off duty. No report was received from the operator at Pattonsburg, and at about 9.00 p.m. he inquired of the operator regarding the rainfall and was told that it had rained hard for a while and then stopped. The operator asked him for a line-up on trains, saying that the section foreman was going out. Nothing was said to him about the section foreman returning, and he did not receive any report from him covering inspection of the track, but he understood from the operator that the section foreman was out looking it over. This report from the operator was received between 9.30 p.m. and 10.00 p.m. No other report was received, and he said that the only report he received of water running over the track was at Gallatin. It was not customary for a section foreman to make a report unless he found a bad condition, or unless he had received a message regarding the condition of his track.

Dispatcher Sexton, on duty from midnight until 8 a.m., said that when he came on duty he talked with Dispatcher Sullivan regarding the weather conditions and about the condition of the track at various points, but no information had been received about conditions between Pattonsburg and Jameson. He received no report from the section foreman at Pattonsburg and inquired of the operator, who told him that he came on duty at midnight and knew nothing about it, but thought the section foreman had been out inspecting the track before he came on duty.

Supervisor Hartman stated that in the two years he had been supervisor there had been no trouble at the point where the derailment occurred. All of the section foremen had permanent instructions of such a character that it was not necessary for them to receive instructions or orders about going over the track in stormy weather to see that it was all right, and he said that unless something wrong was found they did not make any report of their inspection to the dispatcher's office. He considered that if a section foreman went over his section 3, 4 or 5 hours in advance of a train, he was complying with Rule No. 51, relating to the duties of bridge and section foremen, which reads as follows:

They will, in case of severe wind or rain storms, that are liable to affect the safety of the road, pass over their sections ahead of trains and KNOW that the track, bridges and culverts are in safe condition, and report to the Superintendent and Train Master. When necessary, the entire force should be detailed to watch the road.

Section Foreman Groetcke had been out between 8.00 and 11.00 p.m., which was after the heaviest rains had fallen, and supervisor Hartman considered this to have been sufficient. He did not think it necessary for the section foreman to have waited and gone over the track immediately ahead of train No. 14, although in this particular case it would probably have prevented the accident. He considered the section foreman to be above the average.

Section Foreman Groetcke stated that his section extended eastward from Pattonsburg a distance of about  $5\frac{1}{2}$  miles. On March 15, it commenced raining at about 11.40 a.m., with the heaviest rain coming at about 3.00 p.m. After this time

it showered more or less during the night. He had two men in his section, and after the heaviest rain had fallen, at which time he was in Pattonsburg, he tried to get them to go over the track, but one could not be found, while the other had illness in his family and would not go. He stated that he himself started out at about 7.00 p.m. and arrived at the eastern end of his section at about 8.35 p.m. On his way back to Pattonsburg, he passed the point where the derailment afterward occurred at about 9.20 p.m., at which time the creeks in that vicinity were about half full of water. He reached his home in Pattonsburg at about 11.00 p.m. Considering the rainfall during the first part of the night, he thought the track to be perfectly safe for the passage of trains. Before starting on this inspection, he did not get a line-up on the trains and did not know that train No. 14 was late. He had been section foreman on this section about 5½ years and said that in 1915 the track had been washed out at about the same point. With this exception, no trouble had been experienced.

At a point about 5,600 feet east of the point of derailment the track of the Quincy, Omaha & Kansas City Railroad crosses that of the Wabash Railroad. The crossing is at a small angle so that when opposite the point where the derailment occurred, the Q.O. & K.C. track is only about ¼ of a mile distant, being on the upstream side. At a point approximately opposite the point of derailment, about 1,140 feet of track of the Q.O. & K.C. Railroad was washed out, apparently allowing a large amount of water to come against the Wabash track in a short space of time, resulting in its being washed out at the

point of derailment. The section foreman stated that on the following day he was told by people living near there that the water came over the G.O. & K.C. track at about 11.00 p.m. Judging from appearances, he thought that water had run over the Wabash track for a distance of 500 or 600 feet. While statements of the crew of train No. 14 indicated that the washout did not cover more than 60 feet at the time of derailment, more track was afterwards washed out, the total length of the washout extending a distance of 231 feet.

This accident was caused by a washout which occurred between the time the track was inspected by the section foreman and the time of arrival of train No. 14. There is a discrepancy in the statements of employees as to whether or not Section Foreman Groetsche asked for a line-up on the trains before starting over his section. The evidence indicates that the time he returned to Pattonsburg from his inspection was about 11.00 p.m., which is only 9 minutes before train No. 14 was scheduled to leave that point, so that even if he had asked for a line-up and had timed his inspection so as to go over the track immediately before the passing of train No. 14, he would hardly have acted differently. As a matter of fact, at the time when he returned to Pattonsburg from his inspection, train No. 14 had already left Stanberry, only 28 miles from Pattonsburg, but lost about 2½ hours time in traveling that short distance.

G.V.L.