

November 9th, 1914.

IN RE INVESTIGATION OF ACCIDENT ON THE WEST SHORE RAILROAD NEAR SOUTH LITTLE FALLS, N. Y., ON OCTOBER 18, 1914.

On October 18, 1914, there was a rear end collision between two eastbound freight trains on the West Shore Railroad near South Little Falls, N. Y., resulting in the death of two employees and the injury of one employee.

The trains involved in this collision were B. & O., consisting of engine 3665, 72 cars and a caboose, with Conductor Singer and Engineman Eitman in charge, and second W. & O., consisting of engine 3159, 77 cars and a caboose, with Engineman Craigie and Conductor Parker in charge. Train B. & O. had stopped with its head end near Indian Camp, N. Y., and had just started for South Little Falls when it was struck by second W. & O. at a point approximately two miles west of South Little Falls at about 4.50 a.m. At the time of the collision the speed of B. & O. was about 2 or 3 miles per hour, while second W. & O. was running at the rate of approximately 15 miles per hour. The weather was foggy.

There is a stone quarry about a mile east of South Little Falls; proceeding toward the scene of the accident from this point there is a grade of nearly 1 of one per cent, descending eastward for approximately 4,000 feet and a slight descending grade for about 1,000 feet further, extending to a point approximately 500 feet west of mile-post 17. From this point there is an ascending grade for eastbound trains of .17 per cent, and the collision occurred on this grade. Beginning at mile-post 208 near the stone quarry, the track is tangent for about 650 feet; then there is a curve of 4 degrees toward the south which is to 12 degrees. These curves are 1,150 feet long; they are followed by a tangent 750 feet long, and a 4 degree curve to the north 1,959 feet long; then there is a short tangent, 60 feet in length, which is followed by a 2 degree curve to the south, 750 feet long, extending to mile-post 207. The collision occurred on this latter curve.

This accident occurred on the Mohawk Division of the West Shore Railroad which at that point is a double track line, running along the north bank of the Erie Canal. On this portion of the road trains are operated by the telephone block system. Between Harbor and Pottsville Junction, a distance of 66.4 miles, there are 17 block stations, none of them being open, however, between the hours 11.30 p.m. and 5.30 a.m. During that portion of the night the time of arrival and departure of train at an ice house at Frankfort, about 5 miles

east of Harbor, is reported by telephone to the operator at Harbor, who in turn reports to the dispatcher at Albany; this is the last place the dispatcher can get into communication with trains until they reach Rotterdam Junction, a distance of 61 miles.

New York Central & Hudson River trains that terminate at Techa Ken are diverted from the main line at Schuyler Junction to the West Shore at Harbor. During the night of October 17 and the early morning of October 18, 4 trains were diverted from the main line over this route, as shown by the following:

Train No.	Left Harbor	Left Frankfort
Extra 3107	12.54 p.m.	12.50 a.m.
D. U. 10	12.30 a.m.	1.20 a.m.
B. W. 2	1.45 a.m.	2.55 a.m.
Train 2, B. W.	2.47 a.m.	3.35 a.m.

Extra 3107 received a clear signal at Harbor; for the following trains the caution signal was displayed and caution cars were issued.

Train B. W. 2, was frequently delayed on this trip by the preceding train, D. U. 10, and the enginemen and conductor expected to pass that train at Indian Castle, the first station east of South Little Falls. When B. W. 2 reached Indian Castle, however, it was found that the rear end of D. U. 10 was standing about two car lengths west of the passing track switch. B. W. 2, had been stopped but a moment or two before the preceding train started to move, and as soon as that train had cleared the switch and the brakes on B. W. 2 had been released, Engineman itson started the train; it had moved only a few car lengths when it was struck by train 2nd N. S. 2.

On part of this trip conductor Singer had been riding on the engine of train B. W. 2, but some time before the accident occurred he went back to the caboose. Conductor Singer stated that after the train had passed South Little Falls, he dropped off fussee and directed the flagman to put down some torpedoes if the train slowed up sufficiently to permit him to do so. Flagman Miller stated that he got the torpedoes, jumped off and put two of them on the rail, and then caught the caboose again. After going half or three quarters of a mile farther and just before the train slowed near Indian Castle, Conductor Singer dropped off another fussee and Flagman Miller put down two more torpedoes near this fussee; he then caught the

caboose again and both he and the conductor stood on the rear platform of the caboose as the train was stopping. At that time they plainly heard the exhaust of an approaching train but supposed it was on the main line which runs parallel with the West Shore on the opposite side of the Mohawk River and Erie Canal, about half a mile away. When the train had come to a stop Flagman Miller, carrying red and white lanterns started back to protect his train; he had gone about ten car lengths, about half way back to the last fusee that had been dropped, when the train started again and the conductor called him to come in. The flagman started to run toward his train; before he had reached it, however, the conductor called that 2nd W. S. 2 was coming, the engine of that train appeared around the curve and the collision occurred.

Train 2nd W. S. 2, received a caution signal at Harbor, as well as a caution card reading "engine 3463 ahead." At Frankfort a stop was made for the purpose of taking water and icing four refrigerator cars, and as this train left the icehouse at about 4.05 a.m., Engineman Cragier was informed by Conductor Eker that train B. T. 2 had left that point one hour and ten minutes earlier. The night was foggy and after leaving Frankfort the Engineman's range of vision was limited to a few car lengths except in one or two places where the fog was thinner or had lifted.

Engineman Cragier stated that he thought his train ran at the rate of about 12 miles per hour from Frankfort to Jacksonburgh, the first station west of South Little Falls; there he shut off steam and allowed his train to drift to South Little Falls, and then he began to use steam again; approaching Indian Castle he shut off steam again and applied the brakes. As his engine rounded the curve he saw the reflection of a fusee, and at the same time the fireman and a brakeman who was also on the engine called his attention to it; immediately afterwards they saw the flagman on the track and the rear end of train B. T. 2 and heard torpedoes explode under their engine.

Engineman Cragier stated that he applied the brakes in emergency and then turned, caught the handhold at the gangway on the right hand side and slid to the ground, the collision occurring about the time he reached the ground. The fireman and brakeman tried to get off on the other side of the gangway; but both of them were killed in the collision.

Train End W. S. 2 left Frankfort at 4.05 a.m. and the collision occurred at about 4.50 a.m. It therefore traveled the distance of approximately 13½ miles between Frankfort and the point where the collision occurred in about 45 minutes, or at an average rate of speed of about 18 miles per hour. Employees on train End W. S. 2 estimated that at the time of the accident it was running at the rate of 12 or 15 miles per hour, while other employees estimated the speed at 18 or 20 miles per hour.

Engineer Oragier stated that he did not hear any torpedoes explode before he saw the fuses just prior to the collision, and track watchmen who were on duty at a rock out in the neighborhood of the point where Flagman Miller stated he put down the first torpedoes did not hear any torpedoes exploded by train End W. S. 2. The fuses used were supposed to burn five minutes, and the first one dropped by Conductor Singer had undoubtedly burned out before train End W. S. 2 reached that point.

The ^{direct} ~~first~~ cause of this accident was failure of the conductor and flagman of the train which was struck properly to protect their train.

Conductor Singer knew that End W. S. 2 was following his train as he had passed that train earlier in the night at Canastota, N. Y., and he knew it must stop at Frankfort, a point on the West Shore Railroad, for the purpose of icing refrigerator cars. While it is true that Conductor Singer had no means of knowing how far behind his train End W. S. 2 was, nevertheless he should have taken every precaution for the protection of his train, particularly in view of the heavy fog which prevailed. When he was standing on the rear platform of the caboose as his train was stopping at Indian Castle and heard the exhaust of an approaching train, knowing that another train was following, it is believed that he was not warranted in assuming that the train he heard was on the main line. The conductor should not have called the flagman in when the train started, as he has not gone back far enough to insure full protection, and the last fuses and torpedoes used were not back far enough to provide proper protection; instead, the flagman should have continued to go back, the train proceeding without him, if necessary. In view of the fact that there were three men on the rear end of this train, the conductor, the flagman and a brakeman, there can be no excuse for the failure to provide adequate protection.

As noted in the foregoing, the block in which the accident occurred was at that time about 66 miles long; the first train which entered the block received a clear signal, the others receiving caution signals and caution cards. Under these circum-

stances the block system furnished practically no protection to traffic. In that distance trains, particularly heavy freight trains, are very likely to become bunched, and as the dispatcher cannot communicate with train crews for a period of several hours, while their trains are traveling a distance of approximately 80 miles, it is quite possible for dangerous situations to occur, as in this instance, which otherwise might be averted.