

December 18, 1912.

In re investigation of accident on the Western  
& Atlantic Railroad near Emerson, Ga., on  
November 8, 1912.

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On November 8, 1912, there was a head end collision between a work train and a freight train on the Western & Atlantic Railroad near Emerson, Ga., resulting in the death of 8 employees and the injury of 17 employees.

After investigation I beg to submit the following report:

The Western & Atlantic Railroad is owned by the State of Georgia, and is operated under lease by the Nashville, Chattanooga & St. Louis Railroad, the main line extending from Chattanooga, Tenn., to Atlanta, Ga. The line between Junta, Ga. and Atlanta, Ga., a distance of 48 miles, is used jointly by the Nashville, Chattanooga & St. Louis, the Louisville & Nashville and Western & Atlantic Railroads, and is operated under the manual block system in connection with the train order dispatching system. Telephones are installed at passing sidings in order that train crews may communicate with block operators. Each block operator keeps a block sheet, on which he records the movements of trains passing his station. Under the rules in force on this road permissive movements are allowed for freight trains following freight trains, but an absolute block is maintained for passenger trains except when permissive movements are authorized by the dispatcher.

The collision occurred about 1-1/2 miles south of Emerson. Approaching this point from the south there is a

descending grade, and the track curves eastward; then there are a number of deep cuts which obstruct the view and limit the vision of a train crew for a distance of about 900 feet from the point where the collision occurred. On the east side of the track there is a cut 30 feet deep and 250 feet long, extending to a fill 300 feet long, and then there is a smaller cut 25 feet deep and 75 feet in length in which the collision occurred. Approaching this point from the north the grade is ascending; there is a curve to the east which is followed by a curve to the west, almost entirely obstructing the view from the right side of the cab for a west-bound engine. The range of vision from the left side of the engine is limited to a distance not greater than 150 feet.

Western & Atlantic work train No. 27 was working between Junta and Hugo, protecting against third-class trains and north-bound extras, between 6:21 a.m. and 6 p.m. Conductor Gaston and engineer Newton were in charge of this train. At the time of the collision this train consisted of engine No. 27 and 5 flat cars which were being pushed ahead of the engine. Before leaving Hugo Conductor Gaston sent a message to Flagman Newton of this train, who was stationed at Emerson, directing him "to instruct all south-bound trains to stay at south switch at Emerson until we get in".

This message was delivered to Flagman Newton at 3:57 p.m. by Operator Wilson at Emerson. At about 4 o'clock work train extra 27 started north from Hugo to do some work, with the understanding that it would go to Emerson to let

south-bound trains pass. It was within about half a mile of the south switch at Emerson when it collided with south-bound Louisville & Nashville first No. 9.

Louisville & Nashville first No. 9 consisted of engine No. 986, 19 loaded freight cars and a caboose. Conductor Bates and Engineman Edwards were in charge of this train. First No. 9 reached Emerson at 4:11 p.m. The block signal and the train order board were both at danger, and the train came to a stop just north of the station. Conductor Bates went to the telegraph office, where he found an order lying on the table addressed to his train directing it to wait at Emerson until 4:20 p.m. While he was in the office, however, this order was annulled, and the operator cleared both the block signal and train order board. The train then proceeded south, colliding with work extra No. 27 at 4:25 p.m.

At the time of the collision the Conductor and Engineman and the Foreman, Assistant Foreman and 19 laborers of a construction gang were riding on the flat cars of work extra No. 27; the Fireman was running the engine. All the cars in work extra No. 27 and the two head cars in first No. 9 were destroyed. Engine 27 of the work extra turned over on the west side of the track and engine No. 986 of first No. 9 turned over on the east side of the track. The speed of the work extra was estimated at about 30 or 35 miles an hour, and the speed of first No. 9 was estimated at about 20 miles an hour.

Flagman Newton said that while at Emerson he received a message from Conductor Gaston, shortly before the arrival of first No. 9, instructing him to hold all south-bound trains at the south switch at Emerson until the work extra No. 27 reported into clear. He said that when first No. 9 stopped at Emerson he climbed on the engine and told Engineman Edwards that the work extra was coming to the south switch, and that first No. 9 should stay there until the work extra got into clear. Operator Adams, who was on duty at Emerson at the time, stated that he saw Flagman Newton climb on the engine of first No. 9, approach Engineman Edwards and place his hand on the Engineman's shoulder. He saw this from his office but was too far away to hear anything that was said.

Engineman Edwards of first No. 9 stated that while his train was standing at Emerson a man got on his engine and told him that work extra No. 27 was "coming over yonder" for his train, and that when the work extra got into clear he could go. He stated that he asked this man if that was why the block signal was at danger and if he could go when the signal was cleared, and the man answered affirmatively. Engineman Edwards stated that he did not recognize this man as a flagman, as he did not display any flag nor identify himself as the flagman of any train; he thought that the man was simply giving him a message from the operator at Emerson. He stated that when the Conductor came out of the office and got on the engine he asked the conductor why the signals were at danger, and the conductor told him of the wait order which

had been annulled. Having received a clear block signal and order board the train proceeded, passing the south switch and industrial tracks in that vicinity without stopping. The engineman stated that the man did not say where "over yonder" was, and that when the signal was cleared he thought the work extra was off the main line. He had no idea that it was coming to the south switch at Emerson or he would not have passed that point.

At Emerson, Operator Wilson was relieved by Operator Adams at 4 o'clock. Before going off duty, however, Wilson called Adams' attention to the message he had received from conductor Gaston and delivered to Flagman Newton regarding the holding of south-bound trains for work extra No. 27. Operator Grigg, who was stationed at Hugo, stated that when he was notified that first No. 9 was ready to leave Emerson he gave Operator Adams authority to display a caution block signal. Operator Adams stated that he received authority to display a clear indication for first No. 9.

This accident was caused by the failure of Flagman Newton properly to flag first No. 9, and to give the Engineman definite information regarding the movements of work extra No. 27. If he had identified himself as the Flagman of work extra No. 27, or had displayed his flag, or had placed torpedoes on the rail, or had accompanied this train to the south switch where it was to wait for work extra No. 27, the accident would have been averted.

A contributing cause was the failure of Engineman Edwards of Louisville & Nashville first No. 9 to have a clear understanding of the instructions given him by Flagman Newton of the Western & Atlantic work extra No. 27 and to know of the movements of this work train before leaving Emerson.

Operator Adams was also at fault for displaying a clear signal for first No. 9. Rule 28 governing the operation of trains over this portion of the Western & Atlantic Railroad reads as follows:

When trains holding work extra orders desire to occupy the main track to do work, the signalman at the last block station passed must be advised of it. The signalman must promptly notify the next block station in advance.

Rule 74 provides that

Signalmen must have a full understanding with each other as to the movement of trains and must not give a train permission to enter a block unless absolutely certain that block is clear of opposing trains....

Operator Grigg at Hugo and Operator Adams at Emerson both were aware that work extra No. 27 was occupying the block between Emerson and Hugo, and while there is a conflict between the statements of these operators regarding the signal which was authorized for first No. 9, Operator Adams should not under any circumstances have displayed a clear signal for first No. 9 when he knew that the block was occupied by work extra No. 27. He also failed to notify Conductor Bates of first No. 9, when he came into the office for orders, that work extra No. 27 was coming to the south switch at Emerson to let his train pass.

Prior to the occurrence of this accident it was not customary for operators to enter work train movements on their block sheets except when a continuous run from one block station to another was made. Operator Wilson stated that it was the practice to keep no record concerning work train movements except a note for the information of the operators. When a work extra was to use the main track the crew secured permission from the Operator to use the block and then protected their train by flag. Had a record of the movements of work train No. 27 been kept, as required by the rules, and a card been given to Conductor Bates calling his attention to the presence of work extra No. 27 in the block, the accident no doubt would have been averted.

None of the employees involved in this accident was on duty contrary to any of the provisions of the hours of service law. Flagman Newton had been in the employ of this company nearly 8 years. He had been on duty 10 hours and 25 minutes, after a period off duty of 12 hours. Engineman Edwards had been in the employ of this company nearly 17 years, and had been employed as an engineman more than 14 years. He had been on duty 6 hours and 5 minutes after a period off duty of 40 hours and 10 minutes. Operator Adams had been employed for a period of 2 years; he left the service of this company, and was again employed as an Operator about two weeks before the date of the accident. He had been on duty but 25 minutes when the accident occurred, after a period off duty of 16 hours.