

No. 504.

IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
WICHITA FALLS & NORTHWESTERN RAILWAY NEAR HESTER,
OKLAHOMA, ON FEBRUARY 10, 1918.

March 11, 1918.

On February 10, 1918, there was a rear-end collision of two freight trains on the Wichita Falls and Northwestern Railway near Hester, Okla., resulting in the death of two employees and the injury of five employees. After investigation, the Chief of the Bureau of Safety reports as follows:

The Altus Division of the Wichita Falls District, on which this accident occurred, is a single track line, extending from Wichita Falls, Texas, to Mangum, Okla., a distance of 95.4 miles. Train movements are governed by time table and train orders transmitted by telegraph, no block signal system being in use.

The trains involved in this accident were westbound freight trains No. 25 and Extra 558.

Train No. 25 was in charge of Conductor Meguire and Engineman McCracken. It left Wichita Falls at 11.55 a.m., February 9th, 4 hours and 30 minutes late, and passed Frederick, the last open telegraph office, 50.7 miles west of Wichita Falls, at 7.00 p.m. At the time of the accident the train consisted of locomotive No. 914, deadhead locomotive No. 551, 10 loaded cars, 1 empty car and 2 cabooses. This train stopped between Martha and Hester and again at a point 1.8 miles west of Hester, both stops being made on account of low steam pressure. While standing at the latter place, it was struck by Extra 558 at 3.40 a.m., February 10th.

Extra 558, in charge of Conductor Smart and Engineman Bailey, and consisting of locomotive, 9 loaded cars and a chair car used as a caboose, left Wichita Falls at 6.00 p.m., February 9th. It left Altus, 13.7 miles east of Hester, at 3.00 a.m., and while running at a speed estimated to have been from 10 to 15 miles per hour collided with the rear end of No. 25.

Both cabooses of train No. 25 were demolished and Conductor Meguire and Brakeman Brown, who were riding in the front caboose, were killed. The rear end of a coal car next to the forward caboose was damaged and its rear trucks derailed. The pilot and pilot beam of locomotive 558 were destroyed, the headlight and smoke stack broken off, and the front end considerably damaged. With

the exception of the rear drivers, the entire locomotive was derailed.

Approaching the point of accident from the east, the track is tangent for a distance of about $13\frac{1}{2}$ miles. The grade is slightly ascending for westbound trains from a point about 2,000 feet west of Hester, the accident occurring on the maximum grade, which is about .35%. At the time of the collision it was dark and clear.

The crew of train No. 25 had been called to leave Wichita Falls at 11.30 a.m., and under the company's rule, reported for duty at 11.15 a.m. At the time of the accident they had been in continuous service 16 hours and 25 minutes.

Rear Brakeman Carrington of train No. 25 stated that when they left Altus about 2.30 a.m. there was no other train in sight; nor could he see any headlight behind them during the 10 or 15 minutes they stopped near Martha on account of low steam. When they made this stop the engineman did not signal out a flagman; nor, so far as he knows, did any one go out to flag. The next stop for steam was at the point of the accident, but just before this stop was made the conductor noticed a headlight behind them. Conductor Meguire was then sitting in the cupola of the front caboose, while Carrington and the head brakeman were on the floor. He was not in a position to see whether the conductor or brakeman was asleep, but knows that he himself was not. As soon as the train came to a stop, and before the engineman whistled out a flagman, Carrington told the conductor that he was going out to flag. He took with him a fusee and white lantern, but said he did not have time to find any torpedoes; neither did he have a red globe for his other lantern, although he endeavored to get one from the car man before leaving Wichita Falls. At the time he got off to flag the red lights on the caboose were burning; the electric headlight on locomotive 558 was also burning, and when he first saw the latter it was about 1,000 feet from him. He walked back on the engineman's side of the track, all the time flagging with his burning fusee, and was about 5 car lengths from his train when engine 558 passed him. He stated that he could have gotten back further by running but did not do so for the reason that he thought he was back far enough and was waiting for the engineman to answer him, which he did not do until within 7 or 8 car lengths of his caboose. After getting off his train he continued flagging until his fusee was about burned out. He stated

that after they arrived at Mangum he heard Fireman Jenkins of engine 558 say that he begged Engineman Baily to stop and that Brakeman Ely also stated that he asked the engineman if he was not going to stop, and that Ely stated further that he could not understand why Bailey did not stop "unless he either lost his head or control." Carrington stated that he had been in the service since September first last; that he had never been examined on the book of rules, nor had he received any book of rules until about one month prior to the accident; that he was acquainted with the flagging rule, and while in some cases he had been told to go out and flag, in others he had used his own judgment about it.

Engineman McCracken of train No. 25 stated that when he stopped near Martha to blow up for steam he signaled out a flag but did not see any go out; that when he was ready to proceed he did not call in the flagman. When he stopped at the point of accident he whistled out a flag, and while he did not see the flagman go out, he did see him flagging just before they were hit; that he was flagging with a burning fusee and appeared to be standing right at the caboose. He did not hear Extra 558 answer the signal; he saw its headlight when it was about one mile to the rear of his train and it seemed to be a poor light. The collision occurred four or five minutes after his train had come to a stop.

Fireman Kennedy of train No. 25 stated that when they stopped near Martha to blow up for steam the engineman whistled out a flagman. When they stopped at the point of accident the engineman again whistled out a flagman, but he was busy with the injectors and did not see the flagman go out. Shortly after they stopped he saw extra 558 behind them, at which time he estimated it to be between one-half and three quarters of a mile away. This was the first knowledge he had that a train was behind them. About 30 seconds elapsed, he judged, from the time he first saw the headlight until the collision occurred.

Engineman Bailey of Extra 558, who was making his first trip as an engineman, stated that his engine was working all right when they left Altus, except that his electric headlight was burning poorly on account of carbon hanging in the clutch, although when jarred it would burn all right and make a good light. When they left Altus he did not know there was a train ahead of them. When near Hester he discovered the red lights on train No. 25 and kept watching them for some time, expecting to see them go around a curve just beyond mile post 91, a short distance from the point of the accident; he called this to the attention of the fireman and head brakeman on his

engine, but could not tell how far off these lights were. One of the rear lights was very dim while the other was very bright, and at the time he saw them his headlight was burning good. He shut off his steam and was drifting when he discovered that he was about three train lengths from train No. 25's caboose, at which time he saw the flagman come out of the caboose with a burning fusee and give him a stop signal. He saw him get off the caboose and passed him when he was about three car lengths in the rear of his train. As soon as he saw the burning fusee he set the air in emergency, opened the sander and reversed the engine, at which time he was running from 18 to 20 miles an hour. He then answered the signal and told the fireman and head brakeman to jump off, doing the same thing himself just before the collision. On account of being so close to train No. 25 when he discovered that it was not moving he was unable to prevent the collision on account of the weight of his train and engine and the speed he was traveling. About six minutes elapsed between the time he first saw the markers on train No. 25 and the time of the accident. At that time, as near as he could remember, it was possible to see an object the size of the caboose only about 250 yards; this was due to dimness or polish on his headlight. Until he saw the flagman come out of the caboose with the burning fusee he thought that train No. 25 was moving all the time. He thought the accident could have been avoided had he been properly flagged according to rule, as his brakes were in good condition, a terminal test having been made before leaving Wichita Falls. Before he saw the flash of the fusee he heard no torpedo nor was he given any other signal ahead of him. At the time of the collision he was running from 12 to 15 miles an hour. He did not remember hearing the fireman or head brakeman calling his attention to any markers on the caboose of train No. 25.

Fireman Jenkins of Extra 558 stated that when they left Altus he knew nothing of a train ahead of them; that while somewhere near Hester Engineman Bailey said something about seeing red lights, but that he did not see any until a mile and a half west of Hester when his attention was attracted to train No. 25 by one red marker, and later, when they got closer, he saw the other markers. He did not see the flagman of train No. 25 until within about 200 feet of the caboose; he was then standing on the rear caboose platform and did not get down until Extra 558 was within 20 feet of train No. 25. Engineman Bailey answered his signal with a whistle, then made every effort to stop the train by reversing his engine and applying the brakes, after which Jenkins jumped off. When he first saw the red marker he called the attention of the head brakeman to it; he did this

because he thought it might be a switch light at Mangum, this being his first trip on that division. When the brakeman told him it was on the main track he notified the engineman, who did not seem to understand him; he then called to him the second time, and the brakeman did likewise; after calling his attention to it the third time, the engineman replied "All right," and began his efforts to stop the train. The smoke was so thick they could hardly see the markers, and as they had not run over any torpedoes nor been flagged until almost on top of train No. 25, he thought the collision could not have been avoided.

Student Fireman Taack of Extra 558 stated that the first knowledge he had of any danger was when the brakeman told the engineman that there was a red light ahead. The engineman told him to jump, but he did not understand him until he told him the second time to jump. He did not see any red lights until within about 100 yards of the caboose, at which time the flagman was standing beside the caboose flagging with a burning fusee.

Head Brakeman Ealy of Extra 558 stated that he first noticed a train ahead of them near mile post 91 when his attention was called to it by the fireman, who thought one of its rear markers was a switch light near Mangum; he then told Engineman Bailey that a train was ahead of them; at that time he could see but one light, his view being obstructed by smoke; this one light appeared to be about one-half mile away. When he first saw the flagman the latter was about 100 feet from his caboose and engine 558 was then about 100 yards from the caboose. When told of the train ahead the engineman immediately answered the flag with his whistle, then applied his air, reversed his engine and opened his throttle, at the same time calling to the men on the engine to jump. The flagman did not light his fusee until he had gotten about 50 feet from his caboose; and when he first saw him the train was running about 10 miles an hour. They were under the impression that train No. 25 was moving on account of having no flag out, and when they were flagged it was too late to avoid the accident.

Conductor Smart of Extra 558 stated that when they left the coal chute at Altus about 3.00 a.m. he was informed that train No. 25 was about one hour ahead of them. Approaching the scene of the accident he heard two short blasts of the whistle in answer to the signal; that almost immediately thereafter the collision occurred. He was certain all of the air brakes in his train were coupled up and in good order.

Brakeman McCollum of Extra 558 stated that at the time of the collision the train was running about 10 or 12 miles an hour; he was then sitting in the coach-caboose.

After the accident he went to the head end of the train, walking on the right hand side; he saw the flagman of train No. 25 standing between the fence on the right of way and engine 558 and about opposite the engine; also opposite engine 558 he saw the remains of the fusee the flagman had thrown away.

Car Inspector Parish at Wichita Falls stated that he was on duty when train No. 25 left; that he had red globes in the storeroom and would have gotten one had the brakeman asked for it; but this he did not do.

Rule 99(a) of the Wichita Falls and Northwestern Railway Company reads as follows:

When a train is detained by an accident or obstruction, or stops at any unusual point, the flagman must immediately go back with danger signals to stop any train moving in the same direction. At a point twenty telegraph poles from the rear of his train, he must place One torpedo on the rail on the engineman's side; he must then continue to go back at least twenty-five telegraph poles from the rear of his train and place TWO torpedoes on the rail on the engineman's side, ninety feet (three rail lengths) apart, when he may return to a point twenty telegraph poles from the rear of his train, where he must remain until an approaching train has been stopped, or he is recalled by the whistle of his engine. When he comes in, he will remove the torpedo nearest to the train, but the Two torpedoes must be left on the rail as a caution signal to any following train. At night, or when the view is obscured by fog or other cause, in addition to leaving two torpedoes, a fusee must be left burning in center of track as an additional caution signal to following train.

If, from any cause, the speed of the train is reduced, the conductor will be held responsible for fully protecting the rear of the train by the use of proper signals.

The direct cause of this accident was the failure of Flagman Carrington of train No. 25 properly to protect his train. While there are discrepancies in the statements of the employees with respect to when Flagman Carrington started back to flag and how far back he went, he admits that he went back only five or six car lengths from his caboose. This certainly was not a compliance with Rule 99. The investigation disclosed the fact that the company had never

examined Carrington on the book of rules and had not given him a book of rules until about one month prior to the accident, but this can not be considered as an excuse for his failure properly to protect his train, as he stated that he was familiar with the flagging rule.

Engineman Bailey of Extra 558 must also be held to have contributed to a large extent to the cause of the accident. His locomotive was equipped with an electric headlight; the track was straight for at least 12 miles east of the point of accident; he could see a caboose 250 yards ahead of him and actually saw the markers on the caboose six minutes before the collision. As negligent as was the flagman in disobeying the flagging rule, the accident would no doubt have been avoided had the engineman of Extra 558 exercised even ordinary care in the running of his train, instead of relying upon the flagman of train No. 25.

The investigation also disclosed the fact that at the time of the accident the crew of train No. 25 had been on duty continuously 16 hours and 25 minutes. What effect this length of service had on the conductor and brakeman, who were both killed, is impossible to say. The second paragraph of Rule 99 requires that when the speed of a train is reduced the conductor shall be held responsible for the protection of the rear of his train. Flagman Carrington stated that somewhere near mile post 91 the conductor noticed a light behind them and said something to him about it, although in another statement he said that he was not in a position to see whether or not the conductor and brakeman were "nodding." However, the flagman made the further statement that when he went out to flag neither the conductor nor brakeman made any move to indicate that they realized the danger. The crew were under general instructions not to remain on duty over 16 hours; that at the expiration of such period they were to tie up unless given specific instructions to the contrary, but no such instructions were given in this instance. The investigation disclosed the fact that the crew were anxious to go to Mangum instead of tying up out on the road, and they were no doubt encouraged in their action in this respect by the fact that the carrier, on numerous occasions theretofore, had made a practice of ordering crews to complete their runs "regardless of the 16 hour law."