

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
YAZOO & MISSISSIPPI VALLEY RAILROAD AT GREENVILLE,
MISS., ON OCTOBER 2, 1926.

November 5, 1926.

To the Commission.

On October 2, 1926, there was a collision between a freight train and a cut of standing cars on the Yazoo & Mississippi Valley Railroad at Greenville, Miss., resulting in the death of 3 railroad employees and the injury of 10 employees of a log loading company and 2 railroad employees.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Riverside District of the Greenville Division extending between Coahoma and Riverside Junction, Miss., a distance of 125.5 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 on the main track, within yard limits, in the north end of Greenville yard, approaching this point from the south there is a 2° curve to the right 903 feet in length, followed by 1,429 feet of tangent to the point of collision, this tangent continuing beyond that point for a considerable distance. The grade for northbound trains is level to within 846 feet of the point of collision from which point it is 0.13 per cent descending to and beyond the point of accident. Under the rules extra trains must move within yard limits prepared to stop unless the main track is seen or known to be clear, flag protection being required only against first-class trains.

The weather was clear but it was dark at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 4.40 a. m.

Description

Yard engine 187, in charge of Foreman Lane and Engineman Larson, removed 24 cars from an industrial track and left them standing on the main track, there being no other track available, with the south end of the cut at a point approximately 5,842 feet south of the north yard-limit board. The yard engine then returned to the industrial track in order to remove 14 other cars and it

was while the yard engine was in on the industrial track, some distance from the main-track switch, that the collision occurred.

Northbound freight train extra 80 consisted of two flat cars, the first of which carried a log loader, one bunk car, one kitchen car, one foreman's car, and a caboose, hauled by engine 80, and was in charge of Conductor Ingram and Engineman Barner. This train left its initial terminal in the south end of Greenville yard, 4,211 feet south of the point of collision, at 4.35 a. m., and collided with the cut of standing cars while traveling at a speed variously estimated to have been from 10 to 30 miles an hour.

Engine 80 telescoped the south end of the south car in the cut, a refrigerator car, a distance of about 25 feet; the engine was badly damaged but remained practically upright. The front truck of the tender was derailed and the rear end of the tender cistern was bent in by the skids of the log loader on the first flat car. None of the other equipment was derailed. The employees killed were the engineman, fireman, and head brakeman.

Summary of evidence

Members of the crew of the yard engine were unaware of anything wrong prior to the accident. Foreman Lane said the first he knew of any trouble was when the engine returned and coupled to the north end of the cut of 24 cars; the engine could not move them and investigation disclosed that the south end of the cut had been collided with by extra 80. The statements of Engineman Larson, Switchmen Critonfield and Lewis, and Fireman Johnson, in substance, were the same as those of Foreman Lane.

Conductor Ingram, of extra 80, stated that the air brakes were tested, and that Engineman Barner appeared perfectly normal, both physically and mentally, prior to departing on this trip. Conductor Ingram was in the caboose, near the cupola ladder, at the time of the accident, and was unaware of anything wrong prior thereto; he did not feel the air brakes apply just before the accident occurred.

Flagman Kirk estimated the speed of the train to have been between 10 and 15 miles an hour at the time of the collision, with the engine working steam, and said that he felt no air-brake application prior to the accident. He also said that the headlight on the engine was burning properly at the time his train was being switched, preparatory to its departure.

Fireman Mikel, of the log loading company, who was making a fire in the stationary boiler of the log loader on the first flat car back of the engine, said the headlight on the engine was burning properly, that the engine worked steam until the accident occurred, and that he noticed the fireman putting in a fire just prior to the accident. He estimated the speed of the train to have been about 30 miles an hour, and said that the air brakes were not applied.

Foreman Abel, of the log loading company, stated that he was asleep in the bunk car at the time of the accident. After the accident he inquired of Engineman Barner, before the injured engineman died, as to what he was doing and the engineman informed him he was closing the cylinder cocks.

Car Inspector Graham stated that the air brakes on extra 80 were tested, no exceptions being taken, while the headlight on the engine was burning properly. Engineman Barner inquired of him as to the location of the switch engine and he informed the engineman that it was in the north end of the yard, and he said the head brakeman was standing close by, within hearing distance, at the time of this conversation, which took place about 8 or 10 minutes prior to the departure of extra 80.

Night Foreman Heads, of the Greenville water plant, stated that he was sitting at the front door of the pumping station, located about 125 feet east of the main track and about midway of the curve south of the point of accident, when extra 80 passed. The headlight was burning and the engine was working steam, traveling at a speed of about 25 miles an hour, when coming on to the south end of the curve. Foreman Heads said his attention was attracted to extra 80 owing to the high rate of speed at which it was traveling within yard limits, faster than passenger trains, and he commented about it to the fireman of the water plant. He further stated that by the aid of an arc light on the opposite side of the track he could see through the cab as the engine passed and he saw some one sitting on the engineman's seat box, with his back to the side window, facing the opposite side of the cab, apparently not maintaining a proper lookout ahead.

Machinist Price stated that examination of the engine after the accident disclosed the brake valve to be in running position, the throttle open and the reverse lever about four or five notches from center in forward motion. The headlight switch was fully turned on.

Flagman Riles, a friend of Engineman Barner, said he learned of the accident at about 6 a.m., about 1 hour and 20 minutes after the collision. He immediately went to the hospital and Engineman Barner informed him that he never saw the cars standing on the main track until the collision occurred. The engineman also told him that at Nelson Street crossing, located 1,150 feet south of the south end of the curve, he endeavored to close the cylinder cocks with his foot but was unable to do so, while rounding the curve he looked ahead and not seeing any obstruction, he stooped over to close the cylinder cocks with his hands and the next thing he knew the accident had occurred.

The statements of various other witnesses failed to develop anything additional of importance in connection with the accident.

Conclusion

This accident was caused by the failure of Engineman Barner, of extra 80, to operate his train under proper control within yard limits.

The investigation developed that the headlight on engine 80 was burning brightly, there was nothing about the construction of the engine to interfere with the view when looking ahead, and that Engineman Barner had been informed as to the approximate location of the switch engine, while the track approaching the point of accident was tangent for a distance of 1,429 feet from the north end of the curve to the point of collision. The testimony, however, was to the effect that the engineman had endeavored to close the cylinder cocks with his foot and being unable to do so he had stooped over and was closing them with his hands, the collision occurring before he was aware of anything wrong. Had Engineman Barner been maintaining a proper lookout ahead and had he governed the speed of his train through the yard limits as required by the rules, the accident probably would not have occurred.

The evidence indicated that under the present conditions existing at Greenville yard it is necessary to do much switching on the main track, and that there are many movements back and forth by yard engines of cuts of cars with as many as 50 cars in a cut, without the air brakes being coupled and in use. Under such circumstances it is a question whether rule 93 offers

adequate protection, especially when such cuts of cars are left standing on the main track at night without protection and without a light of any kind placed on the leading car of the cut, the officials of this railroad should take steps to eliminate the dangers of the present situation.

None of the employees involved had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director.