

## 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 NEAR HOWARD,  
MISS., ON DECEMBER 22, 1928

February 28, 1929.

To the Commission:

On December 22, 1928, there was a head-end collision between a passenger train and a freight train on the Yazoo & Mississippi Valley Railroad near Howard, Miss., resulting in the death of 2 employees, and the injury of 60 passengers and 3 employees.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Tchula District of the Memphis Division extending between Tchula and Durant, Miss., a distance of 26.4 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 what is known as bridge K 20-8, at a point 721 feet south of the south switch of the passing track at Howard, or 1,466 feet south of the station, approaching this point from the north, beginning at the south switch of the passing track, the track is tangent for a distance of 568 feet, followed by a  $2^{\circ}$  curve to the right 941 feet in length, the accident occurring on this curve at a point 153 feet from its northern end. Approaching from the south there is a  $2^{\circ}$  curve to the left 778 feet in length and then 579 feet of tangent, followed by the curve on which the accident occurred. The grade is practically level. On account of trees and shrubbery the view across the inside of the curve is somewhat restricted.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 10:38 a.m.

### Description

Southbound passenger train No. 451 consisted of gas-electric motor car 114 and was in charge of Conductor Todd and Motorman Heider. At Gwin, the last open office, 4.2 miles north of Howard, a copy of train order No. 22, Form 19, was received, reading as follows

"No 451 wait at Howard  
until 10 45 am for No 492."

Train No. 451 left Gwin at 10:24 a m., according to the train sheet, nine minutes late, made the regular stop at Howard, a non-telegraphic station, and then departed, colliding with train No. 492 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 15 and 20 miles per hour.

Northbound third-class freight train No. 492 consisted of 10 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 721, and was in charge of Conductor Crum and Engineman Gee. At Lexington, the last open office, 8.4 miles south of Howard, a copy of train order No. 22, Form 19, previously quoted, was received. Train No. 492 left Lexington at 10:20 a m. according to the train sheet, 55 minutes late, and was approaching Howard at a speed estimated to have been between 12 and 15 miles per hour when it collided with train No. 451.

With the exception of the rear pair of wheels of the forward truck of motor 114, neither train was derailed, but the forward end of the motor car was telescoped and practically demolished. Engine 721 had its front end slightly damaged. The employees killed were the motorman and the baggageman of train No. 451.

### Summary of evidence.

Engineman Gee, of train No. 492, said that when about 2,000 feet from the south switch he sounded the station signal, as well as the meeting point signal and a crossing warning signal, and made a service all-brake application, reducing speed to about 15 to 20 miles per hour preparatory to heading in at the south switch. On reaching a point about 600 feet from the bridge Brakeman Grace looked across the inside of the curve and saw train No. 451, informing Engineman Gee of its presence. At that time the motor car appeared to be in the clear, but Brakeman Grace then observed that the switch target was

displaying a green indication and saw train No. 451 passing the switch, and on definitely realizing that it was continuing on the main track he shouted a warning of danger. Engineman Gee immediately applied the air brakes in emergency but at this time the trains were only about three car-lengths apart, the accident occurring immediately afterwards. Immediately after the accident Engineman Gee went inside the motor car and found Conductor Todd, who was badly injured, the conductor inquired as to what had happened and Engineman Gee asked him whether he had received the train order at Gwin fixing the wait at Howard, and the engineman said that the conductor replied in the negative. Engineman Gee then found the body of Motorman Heider lying in the baggage compartment, located behind the motorman's compartment, and on searching the motorman's pockets in the presence of other witnesses he found, among other things, two copies of train order No. 22 and two clearance cards from Gwin with this order listed on them, as well as two clearance cards pertaining to another trip. Both copies of train order No. 22 taken from the motorman's pocket corresponded with the copy of the order that Engineman Gee received at Lexington.

Statements of Fireman Sheppard and Brakemen Grace and Williams, all of whom were riding on the engine just prior to the accident as well as the statements of Conductor Crum and Flagman Hall, both of whom were riding in the caboose, developed nothing additional of importance. Flagman Hall, however, corroborated the statement of Engineman Gee that on assisting Conductor Todd after the accident the conductor inquired as to what happened and also said he knew nothing of the wait order.

Operator Rivers, stationed at Gwin, stated that she personally delivered two copies of train order No. 22 and two clearance cards to Conductor Todd, whom she knew, and that the conductor repeated the order to her, she did not see Motorman Heider and could not account for both copies of the train order being found in his pocket following the accident, saying that after she delivered the orders to the conductor she did not know what he did with them. Operator Rivers said that there were several people in the office when the conductor came in, who these people were she could not recall, but she said that they saw her deliver the order to the conductor and heard him repeat it back to her.

Yardmaster Anderson stated that his office is located in the telegraph office at Gwin and that he was standing in the office when Conductor Todd came in, while the yardmaster did not overhear everything the conductor said he did notice the conductor take the train order and overheard him say "451 wait at Howard until 10:45." The yardmaster did not see the conductor deliver a copy of the order to the motorman.

Examination was made of the motor car after the accident but owing to its badly-damaged condition, the gears being locked and the motor dislodged, it could not be ascertained whether the air brakes had been applied prior to the accident, and on account of his condition no statement could be obtained from Conductor Todd.

#### Conclusions.

This accident was caused by failure to obey a wait order, for which Motorman Heider and Conductor Todd of train No. 451 are responsible.

According to statements of members of the crew of train No. 492, at the time they went to the assistance of Conductor Todd he inquired as to what had happened and also informed them that he knew nothing whatever of the wait order. The reason for such a situation could not be ascertained, particularly in view of the fact that there was other testimony to the effect that both copies of train order No. 22 were personally delivered to Conductor Todd at Gwin and that the conductor repeated the order, indicating that he was fully aware that train No. 451 was to wait at Howard until 10:45 a.m. for train No. 492. Why Motorman Heider and Conductor Todd failed to comply with the requirements of the wait order is not definitely known.

During the investigation several members of the crew of train No. 492 stated that they saw nothing of Motorman Heider at his post of duty just prior to the accident, indicating that he was not there, little if any significance is attached to this inference because of the fact that the seat in the motorman's compartment was located behind the motor and about 8 feet from the window panes, and with the sun shining brightly on the glass, the panes being set at various angles at the front end of the car, the reflections created would tend materially to obstruct the view of the interior of the compartment which might

be had by the crew of an opposing train.

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Motorman Heider/the service as an engineer on January 10, 1903, while Conductor Todd was employed as flagman on November 26, 1902, and promoted to conductor on June 26, 1905. Motorman Heider had been on duty 3 hours and 33 minutes when the accident occurred and Conductor Todd had been on duty 4 hours and 3 minutes, prior to which they had been off duty  $12\frac{1}{2}$  and 12 hours, respectively. None of the other 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.