

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
STONINGTON, MISS., ON AUGUST 4, 1924.

September 22, 1924.

To the Commission:

On August 4, 1924, there was a derailment of a passenger train on the Yazoo & Mississippi Valley Railroad near Stonington, Miss., which resulted in the death of one employee and the injury of one employee.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Natchez District of the New Orleans Division, which extends between Natchez and Jackson, Miss., a distance of 97.97 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 derailment occurred at a point 2,173 feet north of the station at Stonington, approaching the point of derailment from the south, beginning at the station, there are 747 feet of tangent and then a 3° curve to the left 665 feet in length and 241 feet of tangent, followed by a 6° curve to the right 976 feet in length, the point of derailment being on this latter curve 520 feet from its southern end. The grade for 1,000 feet is 0.397 per cent ascending for northbound trains, then 1.5 per cent descending for 700 feet, level to the initial point of derailment, 200 feet distant, and then 1.5 per cent descending for 325 feet to the bridge where the engine and tender were derailed.

In the vicinity of the point of accident the track is laid with 75-pound rails, 27 feet in length, with 16 and 17 treated pine ties to the rail-length, tie-plated, double-spiked on curves, and ballasted with cinders to a depth of about 12 inches, the track is maintained in fair condition. The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at 3.50 p.m.

Description.

Northbound second-class passenger train No. 142 consisted of one mail car, one baggage car and two coaches, in the order named, hauled by engine 5044, and was in charge of Conductor Phipps and Engineman Steele. It left

Natchez at 2 p.m., on time, and arrived at Harriston, 2.54 miles from Stonington, at 3.20 p.m., where instructions were received to turn the engine and back up to a burned bridge about 46.5 miles north of that station. It departed from Harriston, at 3.45 p.m., according to the train sheet, 10 minutes late, with the engine backing up, and after passing Stonington was derailed while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 20 miles an hour.

The engine and tender broke away from the train and after running on the road bed a distance of about 300 feet, fell off the bridge to the right and came to rest in the channel of the creek bed, bottom up. The head end of the train came to a stop about 25 feet south of the south abutment of the bridge with the first car and the forward truck of the second car derailed. The employee killed was the engineman.

Summary of evidence

Measurements of the track for a distance of 300 feet preceding the point where the tender left the rails showed the gauge to be practically standard. The alinement of the curve was checked for the same distance and was found to be practically uniform, while measurements of the superelevation of the outside rail, at intervals of 25 feet for a distance of 500 feet preceding the initial point of derailment, showed no excessive variations.

Examination of the tender after it had been raised from the creek bed and moved to Stonington disclosed no defect that would have caused or contributed to the derailment, and the same was true of the engine, which was examined before being picked up, the reverse lever was in the back-up position, five or six notches from center, the throttle closed and the automatic and straight air brake valve in the running position. The track was badly torn up, it being necessary to replace 297 feet of rail and 175 ties.

Conductor Phipps stated that upon the arrival of his train at Harriston at 3.20 p.m. instructions were received to turn the engine and back up to a burned bridge near Learned, 46.5 miles north of Harriston. After taking coal and water the engine was turned and coupled to the train, the air brakes were tested, and the train proceeded northward a short distance to the passenger station. A slow order, not involved in this accident, was received, which he delivered to Engineman Steele, who read it and asked: "what about 15 miles an hour on account of backing up?" He said he cau-

tioned the engineman not to exceed 18 miles an hour at any time. The train left shortly afterwards, stopped at the railroad crossing just north of the station, and immediately after giving the signal to proceed he said he looked at his watch and so fixed the time of the departure of his train at 3.40 p.m. After leaving Harriston Conductor Phipps said some of the passengers commented on the low rate of speed of the train. The train did not stop at Stonington, the next station, and the first intimation he had of anything wrong was when he felt a light application of the air brakes which he thought might have been on account of the engineman finding live stock on the track, and the train came to a gradual stop with no more jar than is usually caused by a regular station stop. Upon alighting from the train he discovered that the derailment had occurred, he did not make any examination of the train or track but returned to Harriston with that portion of the train that was not derailed and assisted in taking care of the passengers. He said the accident occurred at 3.50 p.m. and estimated the speed of the train at the time of the derailment to have been 13 miles an hour.

The statements of Flagman Chisholm were in effect the same as those of Conductor Phipps and added nothing of importance to the evidence. He protected the rear of the train after the accident until relieved and then assisted in taking care of the passengers.

Mail Clerk Loden stated that he was not paying any particular attention to the speed of the train or to its location until he felt a series of light shocks and his car began to tilt to the right, at which time he reached for the emergency cord, the brakes being applied at a point which he judged to have been about two car lengths from where the car came to a stop. He said he had not noticed any other application of the air brakes previous to the time he pulled the emergency cord.

Supervisor Goddard was a passenger on train No. 142 and was riding on the rear platform of the rear coach engaged in conversation with the flagman. He stated that while he was not paying any particular attention to the speed of the train, he was of the opinion that it was not excessive at any time and at the time of the accident thought that he could have gotten off the train safely. He also said he did not feel any jolt or jar at the time of the derailment, the stop being similar to a regular station stop. Although he

made an inspection of the track in an effort to determine the cause of the derailment he was unable to arrive at a conclusion as to a probable cause, but in his opinion the condition of the track was good and was not a likely contributory cause. Supervisor Goddard noted the departing time of the train from Harriston, which he said was 3.40 p.m.

Fireman Cunningham said that shortly after leaving Harriston speed was reduced and a running test of the air brakes was made. After passing Stonington he put in a fire and then got on his seatbox where he was riding at the time of encountering the curve on which the derailment occurred. He said Engineman Steele was on his seatbox looking ahead in the direction the train was moving, working a light throttle. When he first observed that the tender was derailed he called a warning to the engineman, whereupon the air brakes were applied and Fireman Cunningham made his way to the running board, returned to the cab and looked for Engineman Steele, but not seeing him, returned to the running board and jumped just before the engine left the bridge. He estimated the speed of his train at the time the tender was derailed to have been between 15 and 20 miles an hour.

Section Foreman Phillips said he passed over the section of track in the vicinity of the point of accident twice on the day of its occurrence, but noticed nothing unusual, he considered the track to be in good condition. He said the track had been surfaced several months previously and that about two weeks prior to this accident he had replaced some ties and leveled and gauged the track. Upon arriving at the scene of the accident at about 4.30 p.m. he made an examination of the track, finding it badly torn up and out of alignment. He said he found new breaks in several of the rails and a number of ties needed to be replaced.

Operator Cogan, on duty at Harriston at the time train No. 142 left that point, said he made the entry on the train register showing the departure of that train from his station as at 3.45 p.m., and later changed it to show the departure of that train at 3.40 p.m. The dispatcher's train sheet, however, showed train No. 142 as leaving Harriston at 3.45 p.m. This discrepancy in the records of time of departure of train No. 142 from Harriston was explained by Operator Cogan as having been due to an erasure on the train register made by him after the occurrence of the accident, he having been advised by Conductor Phipps and Supervisor Goddard upon their return to Harriston from the scene of the accident that the correct time of the

departure of train No. 142 from Harriston was 3.40 p.m. Operator Cogan explained that on account of numerous other duties it was not always possible to observe the exact time of departure of trains from his station, in this particular instance he looked at his watch at 3.45 p.m. and thought train No. 142 had just departed.

Conclusions

The cause of this accident was not definitely ascertained.

Rule 19, in time-table No. 15, in effect at the time of this accident, restricts the speed of engines backing up, light or with cars, to 15 miles an hour, and the statement of Conductor Phipps that the accident occurred 10 minutes after his train left Harriston, a point 3 miles distant, indicates that it did not travel at an average rate of speed of more than 18 miles an hour, while inspection of the track in the vicinity of the point of derailment, as well as examination of the engine and tender, disclosed no condition which could have been sufficient to cause the derailment.

All of the employees involved were experienced men, at the time of the occurrence of this accident they had been on duty 9 hours and 30 minutes, after off-duty periods of 11 hours,

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND

Director.