

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
CHESAPEAKE & OHIO RAILWAY AT MARION, IND., ON
NOVEMBER 5, 1923.

January 12, 1924.

To the Commission:

On November 5, 1923, there was a rear-end collision between two freight trains on the Chesapeake & Ohio Railway at Marion, Ind., which resulted in the death of one employee.

Location and method of operation.

This accident occurred on the Miami district of the Chicago Division, which extends between Cincinnati, Ohio, and Peru, Ind., a distance of 160 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table, train orders and a manual block-signal system. The accident occurred at a point approximately 2300 feet west of the station at Marion; approaching this point from the east the track is tangent for approximately 2,000 feet, there is then a 5° curve to the right 1,310 feet in length, followed by tangent track to the point of accident, 808 feet distant. The grade for more than 2,000 feet is 1 per cent descending for westbound trains. A clear view of the point of accident can be had from the engine of a westbound train for a distance of about 1,000 feet.

There was a light mist at the time of the accident, which occurred at 5.30 a.m.

Description.

Westbound freight train extra 439 consisted of 33 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 439, and was in charge of Conductor Keith and Engineman Willis. This train left Fowlerton, 11.4 miles from Marion and the last open office, at 12.52 a.m. At Jonesboro, 5.1 miles from Marion, the train was cut in two and the engine and 20 cars proceeded to Marion, the engine then returned to Jonesboro and brought the remaining 13 cars to Marion. The train had just been coupled and was ready to depart when the rear end was struck by extra 437.

Westbound freight train extra 437 consisted of 17 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 437, and was in charge of Conductor Floyd and Engineman Briner. This train passed Fowlerston at 4.48 a.m. and at 5.20 a.m., while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 3 and 3 miles an hour, collided with the rear of extra 439.

The caboose of extra 439 was demolished, engine 437 was derailed to the right and came to rest in an upright position, diagonally across the track. The employee killed was the head brakeman of extra 437.

Summary of evidence.

Conductor Keith, of extra 439, said that upon arriving at Marion with the 20 cars from Jonesboro, these cars were left on the main track between the switches of the passing track; the engine then returned to Jonesboro and hauled the remaining 13 cars to Marion. Upon arriving at Marion with this portion of the train, he instructed the flagman to protect the rear end and then went to the head end to assist the inexperienced head brakeman in coupling the train together. The flagman was still in the caboose but he supposed he would go back to flag. The conductor did not hear extra 437 approaching and said he had just made the coupling between the two sections of the train and stepped from between the cars when the collision occurred. Conductor Keith also said that in the caboose there were the proper signals for the use of the flagman.

Flagman Pursian, of extra 439, said that upon arriving at Marion with the last portion of the train he was instructed to protect his train, took a white lantern, and went back only about three car lengths, as there was a clear view of the track to the rear for a distance of about 16 or 18 car lengths. He did not hear extra 437 approaching, but saw it when it was about 10 or 12 car lengths distant and immediately gave stop signals which were not acknowledged, extra 437 passing him and colliding with the rear of his train while traveling at a speed he thought to have been about 6 or 7 miles an hour. He said the reason he took the white lantern instead of a red lantern when he started back to flag was because his red lantern was hanging from a chain at the rear of the caboose and he thought it would serve a better purpose to have three red lights on the caboose than two such lights. Flagman Pursian was thoroughly familiar with the duties of a flagman and said he understood the rules pertaining to his duties, and his reason for not going back a greater distance was the fact that he thought no other train was within 40 or 50 miles of his own train.

Engineman Briner, of extra 437, said that he received a caution card at Fowlerton which indicated that extra 439 had departed from that point at 12.52 a.m. and directed his own train to "proceed cautiously from Fowlerton to Marion," his understanding of the caution card was that he should operate his train under full control so regulating the speed that there would be no accident even if no flag protection were provided by the preceding train. Engineman Briner said the speed of his train was about 10 or 12 miles an hour approaching Marion and upon leaving the curve which is about 1,000 feet east of the point of accident, he made a service application of the air brakes, just after which he saw the red lights on the caboose. He immediately applied the air brakes in emergency, and while an emergency effect was not obtained, his first impression was that his train would be stopped in time to avert the collision, however, the speed was not sufficiently reduced and when one or two cars lengths from the caboose he reversed the engine and on account of the low rate of speed was able to step off on the ground. Engineman Briner also stated that he did not see any fuses or encounter any torpedoes, and that he saw the flagman of extra 439 leave the caboose and start back giving stop signals at the time his train was two car lengths from the caboose. The statements of Fireman Hopper practically verified those of Engineman Briner.

Conductor Floyd, of extra 439, stated he was riding in the cupola, approaching the point of accident and as the train rounded the curve just before entering upon the tangent track upon which the collision occurred, he saw the red marker lights of a caboose ahead and at the same time saw some one who appeared to be about 4 or 5 car lengths from the rear of that train giving stop signals with a white light. He estimated that the speed of his train had been reduced from 15 miles an hour to from 5 to 8 miles an hour at the time of the accident, and thought Engineman Briner was using good judgment in the operation of the train under the caution card.

Conclusions.

This accident was caused by the failure of Flagman Pursian, of extra 439, properly to protect his train.

While conflicting in minor details, the evidence clearly indicates that the most Flagman Pursian did to protect his train was to go back two or three car lengths with a white light, while he gave as a reason for not going back a greater distance the fact that he thought no other train was within 40 or 50 miles of his own train.

He admitted having been instructed by Conductor Keith to protect his train, and while he said he did not hear the whistle signal for flag protection sounded by his engine-man, he was fully aware that flag protection was expected. For such gross negligence there can be no excuse.

This accident directs attention to the necessity for automatic train control, had an adequate device of this character been in use, this accident might have been prevented.

At the time of the accident none of the employees involved in this accident had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director.