

76

7-1

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE CHIEF OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE LINE OF THE MORGAN'S LOUISIANA & TEXAS RAILWAY & STEAMSHIP CO , SOUTHERN PACIFIC LINES, AT ADELINE, LA , ON OCTOBER 31, 1922

NOVEMBER 29, 1922

To the COMMISSION

On October 31, 1922 there was a rear-end collision between a circus train and a passenger train on the line of the Morgan's Louisiana & Texas Railway & Steamship Co , Southern Pacific Lines, at Adeline, La , resulting in the death of 3 circus employees and the injury of 17 circus employees

LOCATION AND METHOD OF OPERATION

This accident occurred on that part of the line extending between Algiers and Lafayette, La , a distance of 144.6 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this is a double-track line over which trains are operated by time-table and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. The accident occurred at a point about 270 feet west of the station at Adeline. Approaching this point from the east there are more than 4 miles of tangent followed by a 31-minute curve to the left 4,253 feet in length, the accident occurring on this curve at a point 1,169 feet from its eastern end. The grade is practically level. The sidings at Adeline and at Baldwin 3.7 miles east of Adeline, are not of sufficient length to accommodate long trains, and there are crossovers at these points, so that when such trains pass one another they may back across to the opposite main track for that purpose. There was a dense fog at the time of the accident, which occurred between 3.15 and 3.20 a. m.

DESCRIPTION

The circus train was running as the first section of westbound freight train No. 241. It consisted of 23 flat cars, 2 stock cars, 10 sleeping cars, and a chair car used as a caboose, hauled by engine 561, and was in charge of Conductor Adams and Engineman Carroll. All the sleeping cars, as well as the chair car, were of wooden con-

struction This train left Algiers, according to the train sheet, at 9 45 p m, 2 hours and 15 minutes late, and on approaching Baldwin at about 2 40 a m was brought to a stop by the flagman of westbound extra 483, which was about to back across to the eastbound track Train first No 241 left Baldwin, according to the train sheet at 3 02 a m, 25 minutes late and only 2 minutes ahead of the schedule time of train No 109, and had nearly come to a stop at Adeline when the rear end of the train was struck by train No 109

Westbound passenger train No 109 consisted of one mail car, one baggage car, four coaches, and four sleeping cars, all of all-steel construction, hauled by engine 909, and was in charge of Conductor Limerick and Engineman Tanner It was practically on time until it neared Baldwin, where it stopped on account of a burning fusee left by the flagman of train first No 241 After waiting for the fusee to burn out, the train proceeded, passed Baldwin, according to the train sheet, at 3 13 a m, nine minutes late, and collided with train first No 241 at Adeline while traveling at a speed variously estimated to have been between 20 and 35 miles an hour

The chair car on the rear of train first No 241 was telescoped by engine 909 and demolished That part of its superstructure below the window sills telescoped the car ahead a distance of 34 feet, while the third car from the rear was telescoped by the fourth car a distance of about 22 feet None of the equipment in train No 109 was derailed and the engine was not materially damaged

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE

Before leaving Algiers, Conductor Adams, of train first No 241, talked with his brakemen, found that all of them were inexperienced in road service, and according to Flagman Dubiet asked him if he was familiar with the flagging rules, to which he replied in the affirmative After leaving Algiers, stops were made at two points en route Conductor Adams saying that the flagman properly protected his train at these points The next stop was at Baldwin, at this point Engineman Carroll sounded the whistle signal for the flagman to protect the train, and after extra 483 had backed across, he moved his train ahead slowly until he thought the caboose had cleared the crossover and then sounded a back-up signal, intending to back across to the eastbound track Instead of receiving a back-up signal from the rear end, however, he received repeated proceed signals, and assuming that something had occurred to prevent the train from being backed across at that point, continued toward Adeline without recalling the flagman, for the reason that he knew that train No 109 was nearly due, and he said he supposed the flagman would remain out, stop train No 109, and protect his train until it could be



FIG 1 --View from north side, showing wreckage of rear car over boiler of engine 300

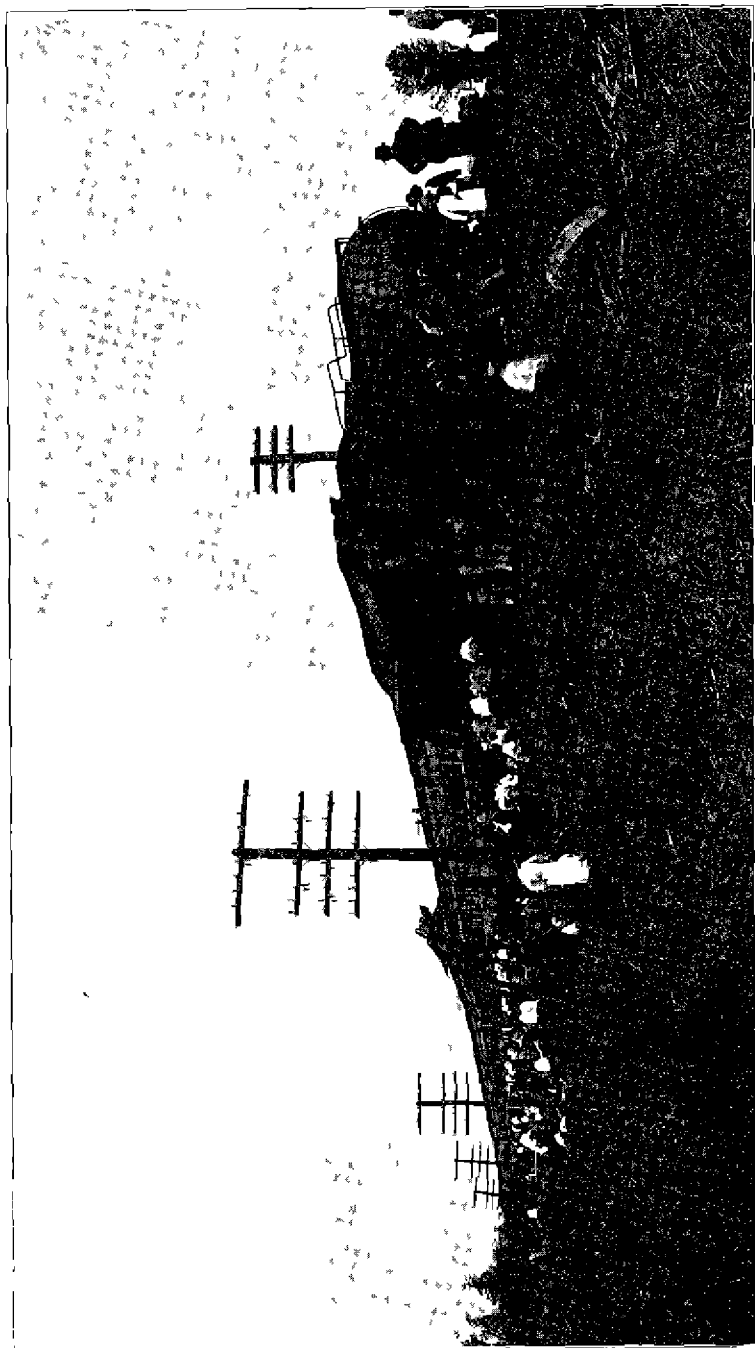


FIG. 2.—View from south side, showing telescoping of run cut and also of third and fourth cars from rear of train

backed across at Adeline. His statements in this respect were practically corroborated by Freeman Harding, who added that the engineman told him to tell the engineman of extra 483 to back down the eastbound track at Baldwin far enough to permit train first No. 241 to back across and clear train No. 109.

In the meantime according to Flagman Dubret, he heard the engineman's signal to protect the train when it stopped at Baldwin and went back to flag, taking with him a lighted fusee, two additional fusees, three torpedoes, a white light, and a red light made by wrapping a red flag around a white light, and after going back one or two pole lengths Conductor Adams called to him that he had gone back far enough, the conductor, however, did not remember making this statement. Flagman Dubret said he stood at that point 15 or 20 minutes, or until the conductor gave the engineman a proceed signal, at the same time calling to him to come in, the conductor also did not remember calling the flagman in. Flagman Dubret then lighted a fusee, stuck it in a tie, and boarded the rear end of his train just as it started. He said the engineman had not sounded the whistle signal to recall him, neither did he leave any torpedoes as required by the rules. Conductor Adams said he boarded the caboose as it passed him, and asked the flagman if he had been recalled, and that the flagman replied he had heard some whistles and thought he had been recalled, he also asked him why he did not go back farther, and said the flagman replied he heard nothing coming. Conductor Adams did not hear the back-up signal sounded by the engineman after the train had moved ahead far enough to clear the crossover switch, and said he gave proceed signals, as he did not intend to back across at this point, but intended going to Jeanerette, 5.3 miles beyond Adeline, for train No. 109, and according to his statement his train left Baldwin at 3:03 a. m., only one minute ahead of the scheduled time of that train. It was not foggy at Baldwin. The reasons advanced by Conductor Adams for leaving Baldwin on the time of train No. 109 were that he could see 2 or 3 miles behind his train and train No. 109 was not in sight, that he figured that train was a little late and that his train would be able to make the schedule of train No. 109. Between Baldwin and Adeline he was working at his desk and gave no instructions to the flagman about throwing off fusees en route, but when his train was being brought to a stop at Adeline he asked the flagman if he had done so, and on receiving a reply in the negative told the flagman to hurry back to protect the train. Flagman Dubret said he got off about opposite the western end of the station, at which time the train had not come to a full stop, lighted a fusee, and ran back to protect his train but had only gotten about one or two pole lengths east of

the station when the headlight of train No 109 appeared through the fog. He then gave stop signals and tried to place a torpedo on the rail, but was unable to do so, as the train approached so quickly he had to jump from the track to avoid being struck. He was positive his train could not have been stopped more than two or three minutes when train No 109 passed him. He thought he was about opposite the fourth car in train No 109 when it came to a stop, although he afterwards stated he was not positive on this point. He also said Conductor Adams told him at Baldwin to watch train No 109, but later contradicted this statement and said he had no knowledge of train No 109 being close to his train until the conductor told him at Adeline to run back and stop it. He did not have a standard watch nor a copy of the time-table. Conductor Adams said he also gave the engineman proceed signals at Adeline but that the engineman did not see his signals. He watched the flagman go back until he was obscured by the fog and then started to walk toward the head end of his train, but had gone only about six car lengths when the collision occurred, at 3 19 a m. He thought his train arrived at Adeline at 3 08 or 3 09 a m.

The statements of Conductor Adams indicating that his train had been standing at Adeline a period of about 10 minutes were not supported by the statements of the other members of the crew. Engineman Carroll said it was 3 11 or 3 12 a m when his train approached Adeline, shortly after which he shut off steam and proceeded slowly, intending to stop when the rear end had cleared the crossover switch, which is about 1,000 feet east of the station, and that the train had not come to a full stop when the accident occurred. Fireman Harding and Head Brakeman Akerberg also said the train had not come to a full stop when the accident occurred, while Middle Brakeman Shennick said he got off when the speed had been reduced to about 6 miles an hour, started to walk toward the rear end, and that just as the caboose passed him he saw train No 109 and jumped clear of the tracks, and thought that when the collision occurred his train was either moving very slowly or had just come to a full stop.

Engineman Pitie of train No 244 which was passing on the eastbound track at the time of the accident, said he approached Adeline at a low rate of speed and saw train first No 241 drifting on the westbound track at a speed of 10 or 12 miles an hour, and heard the engineman of that train sound a back-up signal. When his engine passed the rear end of train first No 241, which he thought was then about opposite the west house-track switch, although as a matter of fact this switch is 220 feet west of the point of accident, he saw a flagman walking eastward, about opposite the west end of the station, and when in the vicinity of the crossover

saw the headlight of train No 109, and at about the time the engine passed him he sounded one blast on the whistle as a stop signal, knowing that train first No 241 was only a short distance ahead. He thought it was about 3 18 a m when his train passed Adeline. Fireman Addington, of train No 244, thought the flagman was about four car lengths from the caboose.

Engineman Tanner, of train No 109, said he was delayed six or seven minutes at Baldwin waiting for a fusee to burn out. This fusee was about three-quarters of a mile east of the station, and he assumed it had been left at that point by the crew of westbound extra 483, which was standing on the eastbound track when his train passed. After the fusee burned out he proceeded under control for about half a mile and then resumed speed. When approaching the station at Adeline at a speed of about 45 miles an hour he saw the markers of a train apparently 400 or 500 feet distant, with a man about four or five car lengths from the rear of the train giving stop signals with a red light, and at once shut off steam and applied the air brakes in emergency. He said his view had been obscured by the glare of the headlight of the train on the eastbound track and also by the fog, also that he heard the one blast on the whistle sounded by the engineman of train No 244 at about the time he saw the markers. His statements were practically corroborated by those of Fireman Dumesnil.

General Yardmaster Stanfield, located at Algiers, said that on account of an unusually heavy cane movement, coupled with the numbers of trainmen off duty on account of illness, there was a shortage of train crews on the night of the accident. The seven crews assigned to through freight service between Algiers and Lafayette were so distributed that none of them would have been available for service leaving Algiers until 1 05 a m. General Yardmaster Stanfield has supervision both of the trainmen's and yardmen's boards at Algiers, and knowing he would not have a regular crew for the circus train without delaying it several hours until the rest of the first crew expired at 1 05 a m., which would have resulted in a delay of several hours, and also in view of the fact that there were two trainloads of perishable freight to be moved by the two crews then at Algiers as soon as they were available for duty, and because of serious inconvenience which would result in the later handling of traffic out of Algiers if the circus train were delayed he exercised his judgment in the matter and made up an extra crew. There were not sufficient trainmen on the extra board, and it was necessary to take two men from the switchmen's board and assign them temporarily to road service. The crew of train first No 241 consisted of an experienced engineman, a conductor who had been used as such during the busy seasons during the past 3 or 4 years,

a fireman who had made two trips under pay, in addition to those he had made as a student fireman a head brakeman making his first trip under pay, a middle brakeman who said he had had 14 years experience on various railroads in train and yard service, but had made only one road trip on this railroad, 3 years previously and a flagman who had been employed as a switchman at different intervals during the past 5 years, whose total experience as a switchman amounted to about 2 years and who had made only one previous trip in road service and had not taken the written examination on the rules although at the investigation his statements indicated that he was familiar with them. An experienced crew from another division had arrived at Algiers at 2 30 a. m., October 30, but it had been necessary to deadhead them back to their terminal in accordance with the provision in the conductor's agreement that when crews are run off their respective divisions in case of emergency, they are to be returned light or deadheaded unless needed for service on a return trip within 12½ hours after arrival.

CONCLUSIONS

This accident was caused by train first No. 241 being operated ahead of train No. 109 without sufficient time, and by the failure to provide proper flag protection, for which Conductor Adams is primarily responsible.

Rule D-86 of the rules and regulations of the operating department reads as follows:

An inferior train must clear the time of a superior train not less than five minutes, but must be clear at the time a first class train in the same direction is due to leave the next station in the rear where time is shown.

Extra trains must clear the time of regular trains five minutes unless otherwise provided.

Train No. 109 is due to leave Franklin 4.1 miles from Baldwin and the last station at which time is shown at 2 56 a. m. Train first No. 241 therefore, should have been into clear at Baldwin at this time, and the evidence indicates it arrived in ample time to have gotten into clear had it not been delayed by extra 483. It is also apparent that it was the intention of the engineman to clear train No. 109 at this point. The conductor, however, had no intention of waiting for train No. 109 to pass, and after extra 483 had cleared the westbound track, he gave proceed signals to his engineman, deliberately disregarding the requirements of rule D-86. Had Conductor Adams complied with this rule and cleared the main track for train No. 109 at this point this accident would not have occurred.

Rule 99 reads in part as follows:

When a train stops or is delayed under circumstances in which it may be overtaken by another train, the flagman must go back immediately with stop

signals a sufficient distance to insure full protection. When recalled, he may return to his train, first placing two torpedoes on the rail, when the conditions require it. The front of a train must be protected in the same way when necessary by front brakeman. If the front brakeman is not available the fireman must act in his place.

(a) A sufficient distance to insure full protection requires that flagman shall go back to a point one-fourth mile from the rear of his train, where he must place one torpedo on the rail. He must then continue to go back at least one-half mile from the rear of his train and place two torpedoes on the rail, not more than two hundred feet apart, he may then return to within one-fourth mile from the rear of his train, and remain there until recalled. If a passenger train is due he must remain until it arrives. When he comes in he will remove the torpedo nearest to train, but the two torpedoes must be left on the rail as a caution signal to a following train.

The recall of flagman is the most critical period, and when there is not a clear view of at least one-half mile, train must be moved forward a sufficient distance to insure safety before flagman is recalled. During foggy or stormy weather, or in the vicinity of obscure curves or descending grades, or when other conditions require it, the flagman will increase the distance. When a train is flagged by a flagman, engineer must obtain a thorough explanation of the cause, stopping if necessary.

(b) Should the speed of a train be reduced and its rear thereby endangered, making it necessary to check a following train before a flagman can get off, a lighted red fusee must be thrown on the track at intervals to insure the safety of the leading train.

(Addition to rule No 99, Section A, applicable only in Louisiana.)

(a) Between sunset and sunrise the flagman shall immediately after he leaves his train light a red fusee and carry it with him back one-quarter of a mile to the point where he places the first torpedo and must leave a burning fusee at the same point as the first torpedo.

While there is a dispute as to what was said by the conductor and flagman relative to protection afforded at Baldwin, it is clear the flagman did not go back the distance required by the rules, and this fact was known to the conductor, according to his own statement, while it also appears that there was a question as to whether the flagman had been recalled. Notwithstanding these manifestations of ignorance or disobedience of the flagging rules by Flagman Dubret, Conductor Adams authorized the train to proceed, when, according to his own figures, train No 109 was due within one minute, and then paid no attention to the proper protection of the train en route or when speed was reduced preparatory to stopping at Adeline, for notwithstanding his statements to the effect that his train had been standing 10 minutes when the accident occurred, it is believed that as a matter of fact it had not come to a full stop at this time. Conductor Adams displayed gross carelessness in failing to see that fusees were thrown off, particularly in view of the adverse weather conditions prevailing at this point. Conductor Adams knew he did not have a crew experienced in road service and should have exercised particular care to see that they obeyed the rules, yet his actions in

leaving Baldwin practically on the time of train No 109, and in failing to see that the flagman properly performed his duties at Adeline, clearly indicate that he had no proper conception of his responsibilities.

Flagman Dubiet apparently knew the flagging rules, but claimed the conductor called to him at Baldwin that he had gone back far enough. At Adeline, however, he knew, or should have known, it was foggy, and that when the speed of his train was reduced it was in danger of being overtaken by a following train, and good judgment should have prompted him to take more effective measures for its protection. Had he thrown off a lighted fusee when the speed of the train was reduced, it is possible it would have been seen by the engineer of train No 109 in time to enable him to bring his train to a stop.

According to the evidence in this investigation, the circus train was only about 500 feet distant when the engineer of train No 109 saw it through the fog. Train No 109 was then running at a speed of about 45 miles an hour, and the speed of this train was sufficiently reduced before the accident occurred to mitigate materially the force of the collision and the damage caused thereby. In view of the wooden equipment used in the circus train and the comparatively large number of people being carried, it was largely a matter of fortunate circumstances that considerably greater damage and loss of life did not result from this accident. Several serious accidents involving circus and excursion trains have been investigated, and as wooden equipment, sometimes old and not suitable for regular service, is made use of in such trains, the loss of life in such accidents is frequently high. Common prudence demands that the operation of such trains be surrounded with all the safeguards provided by the operating rules, and that the rules and practices intended to be observed for safeguarding passenger trains be rigidly obeyed. This was not done in this case as the train crew was composed almost entirely of employees inexperienced in train service, and operating rules necessary to safeguard its movement were flagrantly disregarded. Lacking a train crew of the necessary experience, a trainmaster or other competent operating official should have been assigned to this train to insure that it would be operated safely and in accordance with the rules.

The engineer of train No 109 stopped for a red fusee at Baldwin and waited until it burned out. He proceeded under control until he passed a train which he assumed had left the fusee while clearing the westbound track for him, and then resumed normal speed. Under the time-table and train-order system of operation which was in effect, the engineer had no means of knowing positively whether or not the track ahead was clear, and in view of the

failure of the crew of the circus train to provide proper protection for their train he had no warning of its presence until too late to avert the accident. Had an adequate block system been in use on this line, the engineman of train No 109 would have had means for determining definitely whether the track ahead was clear and of receiving ample warning that it was not clear, and this accident would undoubtedly have been prevented.

The crew of train first No 241 had been on duty about 6 hours, and the crew of train No 109 about 5 hours, previous to which these employees had been off duty periods ranging from 13 to 40 hours.

Respectfully submitted

W P BORLAND,
Chief, Bureau of Safety