

November 7, 1913

In re Investigation of Accident on the St. Louis Southwestern Railway near Stevens, Ark., on October 2, 1913.

On October 2, 1913, there was a head-end collision on the St. Louis-Southwestern Railway near Stevens, Ark., which resulted in the death of 4 employees and the injury of 4 employees.

After investigation of this accident the Chief Inspector of Safety Appliances reports as follows:

Northbound extra 519 was en route from Shreveport, La. to Pine Bluff, Ark. This train was a work train consisting of 15 cars, including a pile driver, bridge material, camp cars, etc. hauled by locomotive No. 519, and was in charge of Conductor Barnes and Engineer Davis. This train left Shreveport at 1:30 p.m., passed Milner, Ark., 6.73 miles south of Stevens, at 7:05 p.m., and at 7:34 p.m. collided with first No. 15 at a point about 5/8 of a mile south of Stevens.

Southbound train first No. 15 was a fast freight train en route from Pine Bluff, Ark., to Texarkana, Texas. This train consisted of 42 cars and a caboose, hauled by locomotive No. 553, and was in charge of Conductor Sharp and Engineer McCabe. This train left Pine Bluff at 2:30 p.m., and at Camden, Ark., a station 20.29 miles north of Stevens the crew in charge received among others a copy of train order No. 18 reading as follows:

"First No. 15 will wait at Camden until 6:50 p.m., then 6:50 p.m., then 7:10 p.m., Ogden 7:25 p.m., Stevens 7:40 p.m., Milner 7:50 p.m., McNeil 8:15 p.m., and 8:15 p.m., for No. 15, No. 76, Extra 553 North and Extra 519 North. No. 15, No. 76, and extras 553 and 519 north have right over second No. 15 Lewisville to Camden."

After receiving this order at Camden, first No. 15 proceeded on its way, passing Maena Vista, 8.99 miles north of Stevens, at 7:14 p.m., reaching Stevens at 7:35 p.m., 7 minutes ahead of the time named in train order No. 18, and collided with extra No. 519 as above stated.

Both engines were quite badly damaged. Several freight cars were destroyed, and several others badly damaged. Slight damage was sustained by the track. The engineer of extra 519, a bridgeman riding upon locomotive No. 519, the fireman of locomotive No. 553, and a maintenance of way employee riding upon locomotive No. 553 were the employees who were killed. The speed of each train at the time of the collision is believed to have been about 25 miles per hour. The weather was clear and both locomotives were equipped with electric headlights.

The division upon which this accident occurred was a single track line. No block signal system was in use, trains being operated under the train-order system. The point of collision was 300 feet from the southern end of a 20-foot cut about 1,700 feet in length. The grade at this point was about 1% descending for southbound trains, while the curvature was 3 degrees 45 minutes leading toward the south. The vision of the engineer of extra 513 was almost entirely obscured on account of being on the outside of the curve, while the vision of the engineer of the southbound train was limited by the curvature, cut and trees to about 300 feet.

Conductor Sharp of first No. 15 stated that when the train was nearing Stevens he was at his desk figuring where his train would be able to go for train No. 1, a passenger train. As his train started through the town of Stevens he went toward the side door of his caboose intending to see extra 513 when his train passed it. At about this time Brakeman Hayben, who was riding in the engine, said that that train was not there and he at once said "Apply the brakes", at the same time starting for the conductor's valve. At about this time they felt the brakes being applied in emergency from the head end of the train. Conductor Sharp further stated that when he handed the orders to the engineer at Camden he remarked that Nos. 18 and 76 were already in, and that they had wait orders on extras 506 and 510. He then left the engine, not waiting for the engineer to read the orders to him as required by the rules. Approaching Stevens none of the occupants of the caboose were able to see far enough ahead, on account of the curvature, to ascertain whether or not extra 513 was on the passing track, and as the train continued on its way he supposed, of course, that the engineer could see that the train was into clear. When he found out that extra 513 was not there he looked at his watch and saw that it was 7:34 p.m. He then asked the brakeman what time their watches indicated, thinking that possibly his watch had run down, and one of them replied that it was 7:35 p.m. He then said to apply the air brakes, as they were running ahead of the wait order. He thought the caboose of his train came to a stop at a point about 1/4 or 1/2 mile south of the south switch. He further stated that he did not hear the engineer sound the whistle signal for the station and he was sure that no one on the rear of the train gave the engineer an "all right" signal.

All the brakemen on this train were riding in the caboose at the time of the collision and their statements practically corroborated those of the conductor.

Engineer McCabe stated that his mind was a blank concerning what happened just prior to the collision. He received the orders at Camden, including the order requiring him to wait at Stevens until 7:40 p.m., and remembered that his train was 3 minutes late at Stevens on the time given in the wait order but did not remember anything that occurred after leaving that point, not even remembering shutting off steam or applying the air brakes just prior to the collision. When asked

if he remembered saying just after the accident "I thought I had not all the trains on the order when I left Ogema" he stated that he might have said that and he might not have said it; that it was all a blank to him. When he was given the orders at Camden the conductor did not read them to him, but on leaving Camden Engineman McCabe read them to the firemen. On account of the other occupants of the engine being killed it was impossible to obtain any statements as to what occurred in the engine between the time the train left Camden and the time of the collision.

Rule No. 89 of the operating rules of this railroad provides as follows:

"At meeting points between trains of different classes the inferior train must take the siding and clear the superior train at least 5 minutes."

Under this rule extra 519 had to be into clear at Stevens at 7:35 p.m. or earlier. The train sheet indicated that it passed Miner, 6.26 miles from Stevens, at 7:25 p.m., and in order to comply with rule No. 89, therefore the train would have had to maintain an average speed considerably in excess of 30 miles per hour in order to enable it to reach Stevens, enter the side track, and clear the main line for the passage of first No. 15 by 7:35 p.m. The collision occurred at about 7:34 p.m., at a point about 5/8 of a mile south of Stevens, and it is apparent that extra 519 would have been unable to reach the switch, come to a stop, and enter the side track within the one minute remaining. It is also apparent that extra 519 was being operated in violation of a special time-card rule under which the speed of all extra trains is limited to 25 miles an hour, regardless of locality.

Conductor Barnes of extra 519 claimed that his train passed Miner between 7:21 and 7:22 p.m., and stated that he figured on being into clear at Stevens at 7:40 p.m., and in any event that his train would have been into clear by 7:35 or 7:37 p.m. Head Brakeman Reed of extra 519 stated that immediately after the accident he started toward the engine. The first man he saw was Engineman McCabe crawling through under the tender of locomotive No. 350. He asked the engineman who he was, but the only answer he received was "My God! how did I overlook them." He again asked Engineman McCabe who he was and the engineman replied, "I've look out for the engine."

Brakeman Mayben of first No. 15 stated that he found Engineman McCabe under the engine steps on the right hand side. He stated that Engineman McCabe said, "George, for God's sake put some water on the engine, what is the matter, what has happened?" He also stated that when carrying Engineman McCabe away from the wreckage the latter was in much pain and asked them not to handle him.

Conductor Sharp had been employed as such by the St. Louis

Southwestern Railway since October 10, 1912, previous to which he had had about two years' experience as a brakeman. Before becoming connected with this railway he had had about six years' experience with the Illinois Central Railroad as brakeman and conductor. Engineman McCabe had been employed as such by the St. Louis Southwestern Railway since September 27, 1906, previous to which he had been employed as a brakeman for about nine months. During this service he had never been suspended, although his record had been marked eight times. With the exception of the one case where he was responsible for the derailment of a breaking train on account of fast running, all of these marks were for minor offenses. Neither of these employees had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law, and the same is true of all the other employees involved, all of whom were experienced men.

This accident was caused by the failure of the conductor and engineer of train first No. 15 to obey train order No. 18, which required them to wait for extra 510 at Stevens until 7:40 P.M. The other members of the crew also are to blame for failing to stop their train when they saw that the train order was not being obeyed.

On account of the death of all the occupants of locomotive No. 569 except Engineman McCabe, no opportunity was afforded of determining the correctness of his claim that his mind was a blank at the time of the accident, although it appears that he made certain remarks just after the accident which he could not remember making when testifying at the investigation. It is also apparent, however, from his conversation with Brakeman Reed and Hayden that he was in his right mind immediately after the accident.

As previously noted, all the brakemen on train first No. 15 were riding in the caboose at the time of the accident. It is not safe practice to operate a freight train of 42 cars with all the brakemen of that train grouped at one end of the same, and such conditions should not be permitted.