

INV. 314

JANUARY 7, 1918.

IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON  
THE ATCHISON, TOPEKA & SANTA FE RAILWAY,  
NEAR NORMON, CALIF., DEC. 12, 1915.

On December 12, 1915, there was a head-end collision between a passenger train and a freight train on the Atchison, Topeka, & Santa Fe Railway, near Normon, Cal., which resulted in the death of the engineer of the passenger train and the fireman of the freight train, and the injury of 3 employees of the railroad, 2 Pullman employees and 3 passengers. After investigation of this accident the Chief of the Division of Safety submits the following reports:

This part of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway is a single track line. No block signal system is in use, trains being operated by time-table and train orders. Rule No. 93 of the Rules and Regulations of the Operating Department of the Santa Fe reads as follows:

"Stations having yard limits will be designated in special rule in time-table. All trains and engines will have the right to work within such yard limits regardless of second or third class trains or extras, but will give way as soon as possible upon their approach.

"All except first class trains will approach yard limits under control. The responsibility for accident at such points will rest with the approaching trains."

In addition to this rule, first class trains, when 10 minutes or more late, are required to approach certain points - Normon among them - under control. This requirement is a part of Special Rule No. 9 in the current time-table, and reads as follows:

"First-class trains when ten minutes or more late are required to approach and leave Kern Junction, Bakerfield, Corcoran, Heedley, Calwa-Fresno, Riverbank, Stockton-Norman, Richmond-Ferry Point, and Oakland, under control, and responsibility for accident will rest with the first class train."

The collision occurred at a point 1,008 feet east of the east switch, and 1,452 feet inside of the eastern yard limit board. All of the track between the yard limit board and the switch, a distance of nearly one-half mile, is on a curve of 2 degrees leading to the left for westbound trains. Approaching this curve from the east the track is on a tangent about 3,400 feet in length and is practically level. From the fireman's side of the locomotive the point of accident could be seen a distance of nearly one mile. It was raining at the time of the accident.

Eastbound freight train extra 498 was in charge of Conductor Pryor and Engineman Scott. After train No. 5 passed Norman, at 3:06 p.m., the forward portion of extra 498, consisting of the locomotive and 25 refrigerator cars, was pulled out of the icehouse track on to the ladder connecting the various sidetracks with the main line, the intention being to clear the switch leading to track No. 1, and then back up and couple to the rear portion of the train, which was occupying that track. The main line switch is only 116 feet from the switch leading to No. 1 track, and therefore it was necessary for extra 498 to pull practically all of the 25 cars out on the main line before it could back in on track No. 1. No flagman was sent out to protect the movement, however, on account of the fact that train No. 5 was more than 10 minutes late and therefore was required to be under control, according to Special Rule

No. 9, quoted above. It was just after extra 498 had pulled out on the main line and had come to a stop that it was struck by west-bound passenger train No. 9.

Westbound train No. 9 consisted of one combination mail and baggage car, one smoking car, two chair cars, two tourist sleeping cars, and one standard sleeping car, hauled by locomotive 1211, and was in charge of Conductor Copeland and Engineman Wing. It passed Burnham, Cal., 7.3 miles east of Mermon, at 3:14 p.m., 50 minutes late, and collided with extra 498 at 3:20 p.m. The average speed of the train had therefore been about 65 or 70 miles an hour between the two points. The speed at the time of the collision is estimated to have been about 35 or 40 miles per hour.

Both locomotives were derailed and badly damaged, locomotive 1211 being turned completely around. The forward end of the combination car was telescoped by the tender of locomotive 1211 and was derailed on the north side of the track. The smoking car was also derailed and quite badly damaged, while slight damage was sustained by all of the other cars in the train. One of the cars in extra 498 was destroyed and two others were damaged.

Fireman Watson, of train No. 9, stated that when he first saw the freight train, about one-half mile distant, he told the engineman that there was a train ahead but that he did not know whether or not it was on the main line, and that he had better reduce the speed, which at this time was 60 miles an hour, or more. The engineman immediately placed the brake valve in the service position. The fireman stated that he then put his head out of the window in order to get a better view, and in a few seconds he saw

that the freight train was on the main line and told the engineman to apply the emergency brakes, which he did. At this time the train was rounding the curve. When the trains were four or five coach lengths apart he saw that a collision was inevitable and told the engineman to jump. He then got off, and stated that he thought the speed of the train at this time was 35 or 40 miles an hour. Fireman Watson further stated that when leaving Riverbank, the last stopping point, a running test was made of the air brakes and that they worked all right. He said that while the brakes held when the emergency application was made, coming in to Mormon, they did not seem to hold as well as they should. He further stated that at the time he first saw the freight train, no smoke was issuing from the locomotive, but he was quite positive that after he first saw the train it moved at least 8 or 10 car lengths toward his own train.

Conductor Copeland stated that he felt a strong application of the air brakes, followed shortly by the impact of the collision; he did not think the brakes had been applied in emergency. He estimated the speed at the time the brakes were applied to have been at least 60 miles an hour, and stated the accident occurred between 3:19 and 3:20 pm. Head Brakeman Heaster, who was riding in the smoking car, stated that there were two applications of the air brakes, the last one, which was the heaviest application, coming within a few seconds of the first application. He knew that the engineman had used all the air he had and when he heard a whistle sounded he thought there was something ahead and slid down and braced himself between the seats in the car. He thought that the train was about at the beginning of the curve at the time the

second application of the brakes was made, and that the speed was 35 or 40 miles an hour. Brakeman Heaster stated further that he observed the terminal air brake tests made by the inspectors at Riverbank and that a running test of the brakes was made leaving that station. Flagman Adelson stated that a running test of the air brakes was made leaving Riverbank and the train was slowed down to a speed of about 5 miles an hour from a speed of 20 miles an hour, before the brakes were released. The speed had been between 60 and 65 miles an hour when the brakes were applied at a point more than a mile east of the yard limit board, reducing the speed probably 15 miles an hour, and then released. Just before the yard limit board was passed, a heavy application of the brakes was made, the collision occurring a few seconds afterwards. He thought that the speed of the train was about 35 miles an hour when near the yard limit board, and that it was reduced to 25 or 28 miles an hour at the time of the collision.

Engineman Scott, of extra 493, stated that when his train was ready to be pulled out on the main line for the purpose of getting the train together on track No. 1, the head brakeman asked him if he would have to flag and he told the brakeman that he would not have to do so, as train No. 9 was more than 10 minutes late. The head brakeman then opened the switch and he pulled the 25 refrigerator cars out on the main line. He stated that he was looking ahead carefully to see if train No. 9 was coming, but that on account of trees it was nearly impossible to see a train coming unless its locomotive was making some smoke. When his train had just cleared the switch he saw train No. 9 coming about 1,000

feet east of the yard limit board, at a speed of 40 miles an hour. He then stopped his train, using the independent brake, stating that he did not use the emergency brake because it would have taken longer to release the brakes and he wanted to back his train out of the way of train No. 9 as soon as possible so as not to delay it. He realized that his locomotive was quite a distance beyond the east switch and when he saw the speed at which train No. 9 was coming he thought they would be fortunate if they stopped without colliding with his train. He then told his fireman to cause the engine to smoke so that the crew of train No. 9 could see them. In a few seconds train No. 9 was well inside of the yard limit board and he told the fireman that he did not think they would be able to stop. When train No. 9 was within 15 car lengths of his train he told the fireman to jump, at the same time getting out of the cab window. He thought the speed of the train was 35 or 40 miles an hour at the time of the collision, and stated that his locomotive was standing and that he did not make any attempt to back his train, because with the 23 cars being handled there was not sufficient time to get them moving backward fast enough to do any good.

Conductor Pryor, of extra 496, stated that prior to the arrival of train No. 5 he instructed his head brakeman that as soon as that train passed Mormon he should pull out on the main track and double their train over on track No. 1. He stated that he thought he would have plenty of time to make this move without delaying train No. 9. He stated further that special rule No. 9 in the time-table was there for the express purpose of permitting

such movements to be made in certain designated yards, without protection, and that in making this movement he was following the usual practice, as the rule required all first-class trains, if ten minutes or more late, to approach such yards under full control. He was in his caboose at the time the accident occurred and did not see train No. 9 approaching.

This accident was caused by the failure of Engineman Wing, of train No. 9, to have his train under control approaching Mormon. His train was more than 10 minutes late, and he should have been governed by that part of Special Rule No. 9, current time-table, which requires first-class trains 10 minutes late, or more, to approach Mormon under control, and which specifically states that responsibility for accident will rest with the first class train.

Engineman Wing had been employed on the Northern Pacific Railway as fireman and engineman from 1884 to 1890, when he resigned to enter the service of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway as an engineman. He had a good record, and at the time of the accident had been on duty about two hours.