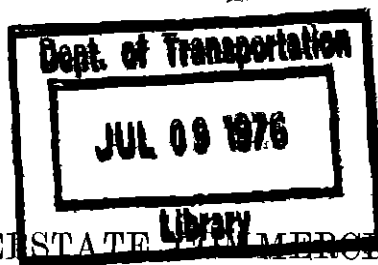


112  
1780  
A319  
CV.37  
NO. 101-  
150

✓ Railroad accident investigation report  
CV 37 no 101-150.

101



101

INTESTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION.

REPORT OF THE CHIEF INSPECTOR OF SAFETY APPLIANCES COVERING  
HIS INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE  
YAZOO AND MISSISSIPPI VALLEY RAILROAD NEAR MONTZ, LA.,  
NOVEMBER 12, 1912

DECEMBER 31, 1912

*To the Commission*

On November 12, 1912, there was a rear-end collision between a passenger and a freight train on the Yazoo & Mississippi Valley Railroad near Montz, La., resulting in the death of 15 passengers and the injury of 249 passengers and 3 employees.

After an investigation as to the nature and causes of this accident and of the circumstances connected therewith, I beg to submit the following report

The New Orleans Division of the Yazoo & Mississippi Valley Railroad, upon which this accident occurred, is a single-track line. Trains are operated by the train-order system, no block signals being used.

The trains involved were an extra passenger train and regular manifest freight train No 58. The passenger train was conveying excursionists from New Orleans to their homes at different points in Louisiana and Mississippi. It was hauled by two engines, Nos 2103 and 85 coupled, and consisted of a baggage car and 9 coaches. It was in charge of Conductor Stinson and Enginemen Montgomery and Wright. Freight train No 58 consisted of 8 loaded and 2 empty freight cars and a caboose, hauled by engine No 404, and was in charge of Conductor Rodney and Engineman Dreher.

The excursion train left New Orleans at 11 p. m., November 11. As an extra precaution, and to secure its safe movement, Assistant Train Master McBurney accompanied the train under instructions from the superintendent. This train arrived at Kenner Junction, a station 11 miles north of New Orleans, at 11 28 p. m. At that point Conductor Stinson received orders giving him a schedule of running time for his train. The train left Kenner Junction at 11 38 p. m., 13 minutes late on its schedule. About 14½ miles north of Kenner Junction, at a point approximately three-fourths of a mile south of Montz Station, the train stopped on account of an eccentric blade on engine No 85 becoming disconnected from its link. While this defect was being repaired the collision occurred. The train stopped

at the place of the accident at 12 05 a m , and had been standing about 30 minutes at the time of the collision, which occurred at approximately 12 35 a m

Train No 58 was due to leave Kenner Junction, the last telegraph station south of the place of the accident, at 10 20 p m On the night of the accident this train registered out of Kenner Junction at 12 05 a m , and left that place at 12 10 a m , one hour and 50 minutes late It made no stop between Kenner Junction and the point of the accident, covering the distance of 14½ miles in about 25 minutes

Approaching the point of the accident from the south there is a tangent  $3\frac{3}{8}$  miles long, leading to a one degree curve to the right The collision occurred about 1,056 feet north of the south end of this curve, which is about 3,000 feet in length

The impact of the collision drove the excursion train ahead a distance of 226 feet Engine No 404 went into the rear car of the excursion train about half its length The fourth and fifth cars from the rear of that train telescoped for nearly their entire length The second and third cars from the rear were not badly damaged by the collision, but fire, which started from the engine of train No 58, entirely consumed the 3 rear cars of the train and partially burned the 2 telescoped cars The 5 head cars of the train were not materially damaged, and none of the cars in train No 58 was damaged

Engineman Montgomery of engine No 2103, which was the leading engine attached to the excursion train, stopped the train on a signal from Engineman Wright of engine No 85 He immediately sounded the whistle signal for the flagman to go back and protect the rear end of his train

Conductor Stinson stated that he saw the flagman going back and then went to the head end of his train to ascertain the cause of the stop, remaining there until the collision occurred

Assistant Train Master McBurney stated that when the stop was made he immediately went to the rear of the train and saw the flagman going back, and noted that the rear markers on the train were burning properly He then went to the head end to find out the cause of the stop, after which he returned to the coaches and remained there until the collision occurred He also stated that previous to leaving New Orleans he had satisfied himself that the flagman was equipped with torpedoes and fuses

Flagman Cunningham stated that he started back as soon as the train stopped, taking with him a red and white lantern and three torpedoes He neglected to take fuses, stating that the weather at the time was clear, and he did not think it was necessary He said that he went back a distance of 1,000 feet from the rear end of the train, set his lantern down and placed a torpedo on the rail He then occupied his time walking up and down near the lanterns

He said he was back on the tangent, and that most of the time he could see the switch lights at Sellers, a station about three-fourths of a mile south of his position on the track. The markers on the rear of his train were also plainly visible from where he stood. He stated that at times a light fog would lower and rise, but the fog was not dense, and he saw the headlight of train No 58 when it passed Sellers. The headlight was not constantly visible from the time he first saw it, being at times obscured by banks of fog. When he saw the train approaching he removed the torpedo he had placed on the rail and started toward the freight train with the torpedo in his hand, intending to place it on the rail farther back. When the train was about 500 feet away from him he began to signal the engineer, but got no reply until the engine was within a few feet of him. He did not put the torpedo back on the rail.

Engineman Dreher, of train No 58, was injured in the collision and was unable to attend the hearing held subsequent to the accident, but his testimony was taken at his home in Wilson, La. He stated that the night was very foggy. The flagman was only a short distance from the rear of the excursion train, and when he first saw his signal he was only 3 or 4 car lengths away. He said that his train was running about 25 miles an hour at that time. The brakes had been tested and were in good condition. When he saw the flagman he shut off steam, opened the sanders, and applied the emergency brakes. He saw the markers on the rear of the excursion train at about the same time he saw the flagman. His statement that he applied the brakes is supported by the testimony of Fireman Taylor, Conductor Rodney, and Flagman Forbes of train No 58.

On the trip to New Orleans on November 9 the excursion train was hauled by engine No 85 alone. On that trip there was trouble with the right go-ahead eccentric. The eccentric became heated, and at Ethel, a station 9 miles from the terminal at Wilson, a stop was made to correct the trouble. At this stop a delay of 5 minutes occurred. The train then moved on to Slaughter, a station 5 miles south of Ethel, where another delay of 35 minutes occurred owing to the slipping of the eccentric. Engineman Montgomery was in charge of this engine on the down trip, and upon arrival at New Orleans he reported the following work to be done on the engine:

Wash boiler, bore flues. Line up front end of left main rod. Put key in right go-ahead eccentric, shipped and some one put chisel in it. Tighten up all set screws on all eccentrics and tighten up stay bolts. Right injector will prime, but will not deliver water. Grind in line check and boiler check on right side. Take down both tank hose. Put glass in cab to keep wind from blowing out cab light. Oil all tank boxes and pack engine truck. Set valves out very bad. Put key in front of frame just ahead of links on right side. Take up slack in both tender brakes. Take up slack between tank and engine. Fix ash pan so can pull same out.

The engine inspector also reported the following work to be done

Put new spline keys in left go-ahead eccentric Draft rods loose Put bolts in right front engine truck pedestal jaw Put nuts on engine truck binder bolts Left go-ahead clevis pin loose Spline keys loose in left go-ahead eccentric Right frame spline key gone

The work report signed by the foreman at New Orleans shows that the repairs asked for were made It was the loss of the clevis pin to the left go-ahead eccentric, noted as loose in the inspector's report, that caused the stop at Montz previous to the collision The foreman's report of repairs made indicates that this pin was tightened before the engine left New Orleans Work reports dated November 1 and 5, 1912, indicate that trouble had previously been experienced with the eccentrics on this engine and that its valve motion was in bad shape Engine No 85 is a 10-wheel freight engine It had been used in work-train service previous to being sent to New Orleans with the excursion train on November 9, and was being sent back on the night of the collision to enter the cane service at Baton Rouge Engine No 2103 was to take the excursion train through to its destination at Woodville Engine No 85 last came out of the shop after general repairs on October 31, 1909 It was shopped for minor repairs on April 19, 1911, and again on June 18, 1912

The coaches in the excursion train were all of wooden construction The following is the order in which they stood in the train, beginning from the engine, and the dates when built

	Number	Year built		Number	Year built
Baggage car	518	1888	Coach	1542	1875
Coach	1546	1869	Do	1537	1872
Do	1565	1883	Do	1561	1887
Do	46	1890	Chair car	3502	1889
Do	1518	1870	Coach	2007	1900

The coaches all had open platforms with the exception of chair car No 3502 and coach No 2007, which had wide vestibules Coach 2007 was the only car in the train equipped with an antitelescoping device It does not appear that coaches 1565 and 1518, built in 1883 and 1870, respectively, had ever been in the shops to receive thorough repairs Coach 1565 last received general repairs in December, 1909, and coach 1518 received general repairs in March, 1912 Coaches 1542 and 1537, one built in 1875 and the other in 1872, were the ones which telescoped

The direct cause of this accident was the failure of Flagman Cunningham properly to protect the rear of his train There can be no doubt that he grossly violated the rules of the company, and absolutely neglected his duty as a flagman

Rule 99 of the Yazoo & Mississippi Valley Railroad Co reads 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. One-fourth of a mile from the rear of the train he will place one torpedo on the rail. Continuing back one-half mile from the rear of his train, he will place two torpedoes on the rail, two rail lengths apart. He may then return to the single torpedo, where he must remain until relieved by another flagman or is recalled by the whistle of his engine. When recalled, if he does not see or hear an approaching train, the single torpedo will be removed (and not before). If conditions warrant, a red fusee will be displayed to protect his train while returning.

During foggy or stormy weather in the vicinity of obscured curves or descending grades, or if other conditions require it, the flagman will increase the distance.

Should a train be seen or heard approaching before flagman has reached the required distance, he must, by night or during foggy or stormy weather, display a red fusee, continuing in the direction of the approaching train. Under no circumstances may a flagman allow a train which must stop to pass him without having placed one torpedo on the rail.

If the flagman is recalled before reaching the required distance, he will, if necessary, place two torpedoes on the rail two rail lengths apart by day, and by night display a red fusee in addition, to protect his train while returning.

Flagman Cunningham, by his own admission, was at no time more than 1,200 feet to the rear of his train. He had no torpedoes on the rail, and although the weather was foggy he did not take fusees with him when he started back to flag, but left them on the rear end of his train. Had a fusee been used by him when he first saw the headlight of train No 58 the collision would probably have been averted, even though he was not back a sufficient distance to insure full protection as required by the rule.

Flagman Cunningham was but 19 years of age and had been in the employ of the Yazoo & Mississippi Valley Railroad in various capacities for about six years. He first went to work for the company when he was a boy 12 or 13 years old, at which time he was employed to run a water pump. After running the pump for a period of about four months he went to work as a section gang laborer, and continued in that capacity for about one year and a half. He was then made assistant section foreman, and after being at this work a period of one year he was made foreman of a section. After being employed as section foreman two years he entered the train service as a flagman. His application for this position was made on August 27, 1911, and he was employed as flagman on September 3, 1911. He continued to work as flagman up to the time of the accident, a period of one year and two months. The birth date entered upon his application for a position as flagman is February 5, 1880, indicating that he was 31 years of age. When questioned about this he stated that the date 1880 was a mistake, as it was meant to be 1890, but the correct date of his birth was February 15, 1893. After

making this application he was put to work learning the road for the period between August 27 and September 3, at which time he was given regular employment as flagman

Contributing to the accident were the failures of Conductor Stinson and Assistant Trainmaster McBurney properly to perform their duties, and the failure of Engineman Dreher of train No 58 to obey the rule which prescribes a speed limit of 25 miles per hour for freight trains

Rule No 100 of the book of rules provides that when a flagman goes back to protect the rear of his train the conductor on a passenger train must take his place at the rear of the train, and rule No 817 provides that the conductor must not allow other duties to interfere with the proper protection of his train and requires him to see that the flagman strictly observes the rules and takes proper measures to protect the train. Conductor Stinson disregarded both of these rules when he did not take his place at the rear of the train where he could plainly have seen that Flagman Cunningham did not go back the required distance. After going to the head end and ascertaining the cause of the stop at Montz he should have immediately returned to the rear end of his train, where the rules require him to be under those circumstances. Conductor Stinson was employed as a flagman January 1, 1908, and had been used as an extra conductor for the last four years. His record was good.

Assistant Trainmaster McBurney was also responsible for the safe movement of this train, but he took no proper means to see that the train was protected. Neither he nor Conductor Stinson knew that train No 58 was behind them, as both failed to check the register properly at Kenner Junction. Conductor Stinson stated that he did not check the register for inferior trains, as he did not consider that the position of these inferior trains was any concern of his. No 58 being a fast freight train and being past due at Kenner Junction at the time the excursion train arrived there, had either Conductor Stinson or Assistant Trainmaster McBurney taken the pains to ascertain whether that train had arrived they would have known that it was still behind them and would have been in better position to take proper measures to insure the safety of their train. The fact that Assistant Trainmaster McBurney had been detailed to accompany the train and see that it was properly handled made it incumbent upon him to be sure that Flagman Cunningham properly performed his duties. Mr McBurney failed to observe that the flagman did not provide himself with fuses before going back, neither did he closely observe whether the flagman went back far enough to insure full protection. Had he gone to the rear end of the train he could have plainly seen the position of the flagman and would have known that he was not back far enough to insure protection.

Before his promotion on August 18, 1912, to the position of assistant trainmaster, Mr McBurney had 12 years' experience in train service, all on this division. A higher degree of care is naturally to be expected of an official, and when he fails to obey rules and safety requirements, subordinate employees will, as in this case, reflect the effect of his dereliction.

It appears from the evidence that train No 58 was approximately 1,000 feet from the rear of the excursion train when Engineman Dreher first noticed the flagman and answered his signal, and only a few seconds thereafter the collision occurred. Engineman Dreher stated that he could not have stopped his train within a less distance than 1,800 feet. An engineman of 20 years' experience who testified at the investigation held by the railroad company said that a train consisting of engine and 10 cars, running 25 miles per hour, could be stopped in a distance of 1,100 or 1,200 feet. Superintendent Mooney put the distance at 1,000 feet. The engine of train No 58 plowed almost entirely through the rear coach of the excursion train, telescoped two coaches for almost their entire length, and drove the entire train ahead a distance of 226 feet. The severity of the impact makes it evident that Engineman Dreher was greatly exceeding the speed limit of 25 miles per hour at the time he was flagged. The elapsed time of train No 58 from Kenner Junction to the point of the collision indicates that it traveled the entire distance at an average speed of 34.8 miles per hour. Engineman Dreher knew that the excursion train was but 30 minutes ahead of him at Kenner Junction, and that in view of his own statement that the weather was very foggy he should have been especially careful to observe the rule which limited the speed of his train to 25 miles per hour.

Engineman Dreher was employed as a fireman September 4, 1900, and promoted to engineman October 2, 1906. On April 23, 1908, he was reduced to Class B and given an actual suspension, and on December 20, 1910, was given 30 demerit marks, in each instance for responsibility for a collision.

The majority of the coaches in the excursion train had been in service many years and would not be considered suitable for use in heavy trains in main-line service.

They were used as smoking cars and in excursion service, and in this case special precautions were taken to insure the safe movement of the train by providing extra supervision and running it at a very moderate rate of speed. The running time of this train for a distance of 97.4 miles, as shown by the schedule order given it at Kenner Junction, was 3 hours and 50 minutes, or at an average speed of about 25.5 miles per hour.

On that part of the road between Kenner Junction and Wilson, a distance of 111 miles, as many as 35 trains per day are sometimes

run, and there is an average of 20 trains per day the year around. To handle this business the company maintains 17 telegraph offices. The offices at Wilson and Kenner Junction are continuously operated. Between Kenner Junction and Wilson there are 15 offices, only two of which are regularly open at night. Baton Rouge, 33 miles south of Wilson and 78 miles north of Kenner Junction, is a day and night office, and Gramercy, 30 miles north of Kenner Junction and 81 miles south of Wilson, is a night office only. During the cane season night offices are temporarily opened at other places. Two such temporary offices were in operation on the night of the collision, one at Reserve and another at Burnside, stations, respectively, 23 and 51 miles north of Kenner Junction. By time-card rule trains running in the same direction are required to be spaced 10 minutes apart. When this rule is observed protection to trains in the immediate vicinity of open telegraph offices is afforded, but on account of the long distances existing between open offices at night a fast train can overtake a train moving at slower speed. Traffic of such density as exists on this line would seem to warrant the use of a block system for the operation of trains.

The Yazoo & Mississippi Valley Railroad is controlled by the Illinois Central Railroad Co. The officials of the company recognize the superiority of the block system from the standpoint of safety, and are making extensive installations of automatic block signals at various points where traffic is most dense. In the immediate vicinity of New Orleans automatic block signals are in use. The reason given for not using the block system on the division where this collision occurred was that all money available for the installation of block signals is already being spent on portions of the system where traffic conditions more urgently require them. This argument, of course, applies only to the automatic block system. There is no reason why a manual block system could not be introduced on this division, the maintenance of a few more night offices being all that would be required to secure the additional factor of safety afforded by such a block system.

Respectfully submitted

H W BELNAP,  
*Chief Inspector of Safety Appliances*

