INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE CHICAGO & NORTHWESTERN RAILWAY NEAR GLADSTONE PARK, CHICAGO, ILL., ON SEPTEMBER 16, 1926.

October 26, 1926.

To the Commission:

On September 16, 1926, there was a side collision between a freight train and a work train on the Chicago and NorthWestern Railway near Gladstone Park, Chicago, Ill., which resulted in the death of 1 employee and the injury of 3 employees.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on Sub-division 4 of the Wisconsin Division which extends between Chicago and Harvard, Ill., a distance of 62.7 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this is a double-track line over which trains are operated by time-table, train orders, and an automatic block-signal system. Trains running with the current of traffic keep to the left. The accident occurred at a point approximately 1,124 feet east of Gladstone Park, a suburban station within the city limits of Chicago located 9.7 miles west of the station at Chicago; approaching this point from the west the track is tangent for several miles, while the grade at the point of accident is 0.35 per cent ascending for eastbound trains. The automatic signals involved are of the Hall banjo type, and are located about 825 feet and 1¼ miles, respectively west of the point of accident.

The weather was clear and dark at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 6.52 p.m.

Description

Eastbound freight extra 1905 consisted of 40 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 1905, and was in charge of Conductor Cipriana and Engineman Melzer.

This train passed Des Plaines, 6.9 miles west of Gladstone Park, at 6.38 p.m., and collided with a wrecking derrick that was standing on the westbound track, fouling the eastbound track, while traveling at a speed variously estimated to have been between 4 and 10 miles an hour.

Westbound work extra 74 consisted of a wrecking derrick, four cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 74, and was in charge of Conductor Richardson and Engineman Stout. This train was standing on the westbound main track opposite a crossover located about 1,000 feet east of Gladstone Park with the derrick swung diagonally across the track, which caused it to foul the eastbound track, and was in this position when it was struck by extra 1905.

Engine 1905 was derailed and came to rest to the north on its left side; the tender and the following two cars in its train were also derailed, the cars being demolished. The wrecking derrick was derailed and badly damaged, while two cars in the train of extra 84 were derailed and overturned, one of them being destroyed. The employee killed was the fireman of extra 1905.

Summary of evidence

Engineman Melzer, of extra 1905, stated that as his train was approaching the distant signal at a speed of about 35 miles an hour he noticed a caution indication displayed by that signal and shortly afterwards he shut off steam and permitted his train to drift. Before he reached the signal he saw it go to the clear position and at the same time he noticed the next signal in advance, as well as the following signal which was located beyond the point of accident, displaying green or proceed indications. He then began working steam and was still running about 35 miles an hour when he was flagged with red and white lights by a flagman who was standing between the two main tracks east of Gladstone Park and about 15 or 20 car-lengths ahead of his train. Engineman Melzer acknowledged the flagman's signals with two short blasts of the whistle, and then shut off steam and made a service application of the brakes and continued to hold the brake valve in that position, with the headlight dimmed, until

his engine passed the engine of the train standing on the westbound main track. He then noticed the derrick, fouling the eastbound track, and sounded several short blasts of the whistle, but was not certain as to whether or not he made an emergency application of the brakes; he then called to his fireman and jumped from the left side of the engine cab. He said the flagman did not give him violent stop signals nor did he notice any other signals being given in the vicinity of the standing train. He understood that under the rules a train when flagged is required to stop if possible before reaching the flagman and if unable to do so, then it is to be stopped just as soon thereafter as possible. Engineman Melzer further stated, however, that when he noticed the automatic signals go to the clear position and saw the dimmed headlight of the engine standing on the westbound track he thought that some train had been using the eastbound track and had just gotten into clear on the westbound track. He estimated the speed of his train at the time of the collision at about 4 miles an hour, and said that had an emergency application of the brakes been made at the time he first saw the flagman's signals, or even when passing the flagman he could have stopped his train before the collision occurred.

The statements of Conductor Cipriani and Brakemen Jablonski and Surma, of extra 1905, evolved nothing of importance as they were unaware of anything unusual until the collision occurred.

Conductor Richardson, of extra 74, stated that his train was standing on the westbound main track at the crossover for the purpose of rerailing a car on an adjoining industry track, and that he instructed Brakeman Reynolds to proceed westward to protect the eastbound track and Brakeman Barclay to go back and protect his own train on the westbound track, making certain they both had the proper flagging equipment. After these brakemen had gone out what he thought was a sufficient distance the derrick was swung across the tracks and work started on rerailing the car. As an additional precaution Conductor Richardson opened the crossover switch on the eastbound track which set the signals on that track in the stop position. Shortly afterwards he saw the headlight of an approaching eastbound train and he said he thought the train

had been stopped by the flagman and therefore he closed the crossover switch, which cleared the automatic signals on the eastbound track. Shortly afterwards he noticed the train continuing towards him at slow speed and began giving stop signals with a white light, and continued to do so until the collision occurred. Conductor Richardson estimated it was from 8 to 10 minutes from the time he closed the switch until he began giving stop signals, and said he did not think the clearing of the signals should have mislead the engineman of the approaching train.

Engineman Stout, of extra 74, stated that he saw Conductor Richardson open the crossover switch when extra 1905 was some distance west of the point of accident and after about two minutes saw him close it again. He also noticed the flagman going westward with red and white lights, and estimated the speed of engine 1905 when it passed his own engine to have been about 15 miles an hour.

Brakeman Reynolds stated that he proceeded to a point which was about 960 feet west of where his train was standing, for the purpose of providing flag protection, and when he saw the headlight of the approaching train he gave stop signals which were answered by two short blasts of the whistle. At that time the train was about one-half mile distant and when his signals were acknowledged he gave five or six additional stop signals and then stepped from the center of the eastbound track to a point between the two main tracks. He did not use a fusee or torpedoes as the weather was clear and as the engineman of the approaching train had answered his hand signals. The engine worked steam after his signals were acknowledged, the engineman shutting off steam when about 20 car-lengths from where he was standing. As the engine passed him he thought the speed was being reduced but did not notice sparks flying from the wheels as would have been the case had the brakes been applied in emergency, and he shouted to the engineman that the track was fouled, but did not get any response. He also noticed some one giving stop signals with a white light in the vicinity of where his train was standing. He estimated the speed of the eastbound train at the time it passed him at about 15 miles an hour.

Conclusions

This accident was caused primarily by the failure of Engineman Melzer properly to obey the stop signals of Brakeman Reynolds.

Engineman Melzer admitted that he saw the stop signals being given by Brakeman Reynolds, but made no effort to bring his train to a stop as he noticed the distant signal, which had been in caution position, go to clear, observed that two or three signals in advance were in the clear position, and assumed that some train had been using the eastbound track and had just gotten into clear on the westbound track. The signal indications, however, in no way relieved him of the duty of stopping when flagged, and had he taken the necessary measures to bring his train to a stop when he first saw the stop signals of the flagman the accident would have been prevented.

Conductor Richardson showed very poor judgment when, after opening the eastbound crossover switch and causing the signals for that track to display a stop indication, he closed the switch and thus cleared the signals in the face of an approaching train. In his effort to add more protection to his train, which was fouling the eastbound track, he created a situation which was confusing to the engineman of the approaching train, and indirectly resulted in his failure to bring his train to a stop.

All of the employees involved, except Brakeman Reynolds, were experienced men, and at the time of the accident none of them had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law.

Respectfully submitted

W. P. BORLAND

Director.