

In re Investigation of Accident on the Vandalia Railroad near Otter Creek Junction, Ind., on August 27, 1913.

On August 27, 1913, there was a head-and collision between a passenger train and a freight train on the Vandalia Railroad near Otter Creek Junction, Ind., resulting in the death of the fireman of the passenger train and the injury of four passengers.

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

Northbound train No. 80, known as the St. Louis-Toledo Express, was en route from Terre Haute, Ind., to Logansport, Ind. It consisted of one combination baggage and passenger car, one coach and one Pullman sleeping car, all of wooden construction, hauled by locomotive No. 13, and was in charge of Conductor Cochran and Engineman Wells. This train left Terre Haute at 9:11 P.M., 6 minutes late, passed Otter Creek Junction at 9:23 p.m., 6 minutes late and collided with southbound freight train third No. 165 at a point about three-quarters of a mile north of Otter Creek Junction at 9:25 p.m., while running at a speed of about 35 miles per hour.

Southbound freight train third No. 165 was en route from Garfield, Ind., to Terre Haute, Ind. It consisted of five cars and a caboose, hauled by locomotive No. 159, and was in charge of Conductor Burgman and Engineman Bundy. This train left Garfield at 6:32 p.m., passed Rosedale, Ind., the last telegraph station north of the point of accident and five miles distant therefrom, at 9:03 p.m., and at 9:25 p.m. was struck by train No. 80 after being brought to a stop near Otter Creek

Junction.

Both engines were considerably damaged and two freight cars were totally destroyed. There was no damage to the passenger cars, and the remaining freight cars were only slightly damaged.

This division of the Vandalia Railroad is a single-track line, trains being operated by the train-order system. The manual block system in use affords protection for following movements only. The collision occurred at the south end of a ten-foot cut 165 feet in length, on a slight grade descending northward. At this point the track is straight in either direction, the range of vision northward being four miles and the southward vision being two and one-half miles. The weather at the time of the accident was clear. Both engines were equipped with oil headlights.

At Guion, a station 26.4 miles north of Otter Creek Junction, the crew in charge of train third No. 165 received a copy of train order No. 90, reading as follows:

No. 166, Eng. unknown, wait at Otter Creek Jct. until nine fifty-five, 9:55 p.m., Rosedale until ten fifteen, 10:15 p.m., and Rockville until eleven ten, 11:10 p.m. for 2nd & 3rd No. 165, Engs. 351 & 159.

Under this order third No. 165 had to clear train No. 166 at Otter Creek Junction by 9:55 p.m. After leaving Guion en route to Otter Creek Junction, stops were made at various points. During the first part of this run to Otter Creek Junction the members of the crew were figuring on going to that point for train No. 166, and some of them had in mind the fact that their

train had to meet train No. 80 at some point along the road, but after leaving Rockville, 17 miles from Otter Creek Junction, they entirely forgot that train, thinking only of going to Otter Creek Junction for train No. 166.

Engineman Bundy stated that approaching Otter Creek Junction he saw a headlight which he supposed to belong to train No. 166, and began to reduce the speed of his train. On getting nearer he remarked to the fireman that it was not going to stop, applied the emergency brakes and jumped from his engine. Up to the time that train No. 80 was close enough to enable him to see the number of its engine, he thought it was train No. 166, and that that train had failed to wait at Otter Creek Junction until 9:55 p.m., as required by train order No. 90. Third No. 165 had stopped, or nearly stopped, when the collision occurred.

The statements of the other members of the freight train crew showed that all of them had forgotten train No. 80, thinking only of train No. 166.

Engineman Wells of train No. 80 stated that while going past the siding at Otter Creek Junction he saw a flash of green, and at first thought it belonged to a freight train on the siding at that point. He then saw another green flash, followed by a white light, and knew that there was something on the track ahead of him. He took hold of the brake valve, with the probable intention of applying the brakes, at which time the collision occurred. He estimated the speed of his train at this time to have been from 35 to 40 miles per hour.

The green lights seen by him were probably the markers on the caboose of third No. 165.

Engineman Wells stated that he did not know whether or not the headlight on the engine of third No. 165 was burning; if it was he did not notice it. The crew of that train said that it was burning, although the head brakeman, when questioned about it, said "Well, it made a fairly good light." It would seem that if it had been burning properly it could have been seen by Engineman Wells in time to have enabled him materially to reduce the speed of his train.

All of the members of the crew of train No. 80 were experienced men with good records, and none had been on duty in violation of the hours of service law. The engineman of third No. 165 had been employed as such since January, 1913, previous to which he had had over nine years' experience as a fireman. He was familiar with this part of the road. The head brakeman had had about nine weeks' experience, while the rear brakeman had had fourteen months' experience as a brakeman, previous to which he had had about one month's experience as a fireman. The fireman had had about six months' experience as such, previous to which he had been employed as a car repairer. The conductor had been employed as such since 1902. The records of the members of this crew were good and none of them had been on duty in violation of the hours of service law.

This accident was caused by the crew of third No. 165 forgetting train No. 80, resulting in their train occupying the main track on the time of that train, which was superior to the

freight train by both class and direction.

There can be no excuse for such neglect of duty. This collision might have been averted had an adequate block signal system been in use, but the use of any block signal system cannot be regarded as a remedy for such manifest dereliction of duty on the part of employees as was evidenced in this case.