

April 13, 1915.

In re Investigation of an accident which  
occurred on the Wabash Railroad near  
Garber, Illinois, on March 5, 1915.

Inv-260

On March 5, 1915, there was a head-end collision between a freight train and a work train on the Wabash Railroad near Garber, Ill., which resulted in the death of one employee and injury to eight employees. After an investigation of this accident the Chief of the Division of Safety submits the following report:

The Seventh District of the Wabash Railroad, on which this accident occurred, extends from Forrest, Ill., southward to Bement, Ill. From Forrest to Lodge, 47 miles, the line is single track, and from Lodge to Bement, 13 miles, it is double track. The movement of trains is controlled by time-table, train orders and a manual telegraph block signal system.

On the night previous to the accident there was a severe sleet and wind storm, and the wires were down between Gibson City and Strawn, a distance of about 12 miles. On the morning of the accident, a train was started from each end of the sub-division with linemen to make repairs to the wires. The northbound repair train was running as No. 64, and was one of the trains that was involved in this accident.

Northbound train No. 64, consisting of engine 2412 and a caboose, in charge of Conductor Lillybeck and Engineman Hutton, left Decatur, Ill., at 9.07 a.m. and arrived at Gibson City, 3.2 miles south of Garber, at 11.50 a.m. The operator

at Gibson City was unable to communicate with the operator at Sibley, the next block station, 8 miles north, and as he could not reach the train dispatcher he gave this train a release on the block signal; it departed at 11.55, 2 hours and 20 minutes late, and was running at a speed of about 25 miles per hour, when it collided with southbound extra 2427, at a point 3,000 feet south of Garber station at about 12.05 p.m.

Southbound Extra 2427, consisted of engine 2427, 32 loaded and 18 empty cars and a caboose and was in charge of Conductor Doren and Engineman Hillen. At Forrest, their initial station, they were given train order No. 36, reading as follows:

"Engine 2427 will run extra Forrest to Bement and meet extra 2407 north at Strawn."

They were also given the following message:

"Account wires down, south of Strawn, you will have to get to Bement without orders against superior trains. Run very carefully prepared to stop if any trains coming north show up."

The train departed from Forrest at 10.30 a.m., and arrived at Strawn, 7 miles south of Forrest, at 11.15. The operator at Strawn was unable at that time to communicate with the operator at Sibley, the next block station, in regard to the condition of the block, and asked the train dispatcher for instructions. The dispatcher instructed him to let Extra 2427 go. This train departed from Strawn at 11.18 and arrived at Sibley at 11.36. Train No. 64 was due at Sibley at 10.15 a.m., but had not yet arrived.

When Extra 2427 arrived at Sibley, the block signal was in the stop position. The head brakeman went into the telegraph office and was given a note signed by the operator reading:

"Have no wires--so far as I know the block is clear."

He was also given a clearance card stating "There are no orders for Extra 2427" and "Block is clear as far as I know." The train departed from Sibley at 11.40 and was running at a speed of 10 or 12 miles per hour when it collided with No. 64.

The track is tangent for about a mile in each direction from the point of the accident. There is a descending grade of about .4% for southbound trains. On the morning of the accident a dense fog prevailed along the entire district.

Both engines and four cars were badly damaged, and the engineman of Extra 2427 was killed in the collision.

Conductor Lillybeck stated that when his train left Decatur on the morning of the accident he was given a clearance card authorizing his train to run as No. 64, over the ninth district to Bement. Upon arrival at Bement he found that the wires were down and he was unable to get orders to run extra over the seventh district. He then examined the train register and finding that the schedule of train No. 64 had not been represented on the seventh district, he assumed that schedule in order to move from Bement to Forrest. He stated that at the time of the accident his train was running about 25 miles per hour. The first intimation of the impending accident which he received was when the engineman shut off steam; this

was followed by a lurch and a crash.

Engineman Hutton of train 64 stated that between Gibson City and Garber he could not see more than 10 or 12 car lengths ahead on account of the dense fog. When he first saw Extra 2427, he shouted to his fireman and then applied the brakes and tried to reverse his engine but was unable to do so on account of the latch being stuck. He estimates the speed of his train to have been between 25 and 30 miles per hour at the time of the accident.

Conductor Doren of Extra 2427 stated that before his train left Forrest, on account of all the wires being down, he asked for permission to put signals on train No. 15 and run as the second section of that train, but he was not allowed to do so. He was told by the dispatcher that there was a wire repair train coming north but that he did not know whether No. 64 would run or not. The dispatcher also told him to run carefully and prepare to stop if they met anybody. He stated that after leaving Forrest he was busy in the caboose making out his reports and did not go to the head end and did not know what instructions or information his engineman received from the operator at Bibley. The first intimation he had of the accident was the sudden stopping of the train which he thought was caused by a bursted air hose. He further stated that he considered the message which was given him by the dispatcher at Forrest, as authority to proceed against schedule trains under control and without sending a flagman ahead. He thought that opposing trains were acting under the same instructions.

Fireman Burrows of Extra 2427 stated that when his train stopped at Sibley, the head brakeman went into the telegraph office and came out with a message that the wires were down and that the block was clear as far as the operator knew. At the time of the accident his train was running about 8 or 9 miles per hour; it was very foggy and he could see but 10 or 15 car lengths ahead of the engine.

Conductor Doren of Extra 2427 stated that before they left Forrest his engineman made the remark that the dispatcher did not want them to put a flagman on train No. 15, on account of the delay it would cause to the wire repair train.

Dispatcher McGrath, stationed at Forrest, stated that on the morning of the accident he had a wire in working order as far as Strawn. When Extra 2427 reported for orders at Forrest he informed Conductor Doren that the wires were down and he could not give them any help against superior trains, and told him to proceed cautiously. He also told Conductor Doren that there was a wire repair train coming north, but he had no idea where they were. He said that the message which he gave Extra 2427 was intended merely as an explanation as to why help could not be given them against opposing trains. He did not expect them to proceed without protection.

Operator Koehler at Sibley, stated that when Extra 2427 arrived at his station a brakeman came into the telegraph office and asked what orders he had for them. He told the brakeman that he did not have any wires, and did not know what trains were coming. The brakeman replied that his train

had a message to look out for everything. He then gave the brakeman a note stating that he had no wires and as far as he knew the block was clear. He stated that he did not try to reach Gibson City on the public telephone to ascertain if the block was clear. He stated he gave extra 2427 a clearance because they said they were looking out for everything and he thought as long as they had come as far as Sibley, they ought to know what they were doing.

This accident was caused by Extra 2427 occupying the main track on the time of superior train No. 64, without orders or protection, for which Dispatcher McGrath, Conductor Deren, and Engineman Hillen are responsible.

General Rule 86 reads as follows:

"An inferior train must keep out of the way of a superior train."

Under this rule Extra 2427 having no orders against No. 64, should not have left Forrest. No. 64 was due to leave Strawn, the first station south of Forrest, at 10.35 a.m., five minutes after Extra 2427 departed from Forrest, and when Extra 2427 departed from Sibley at 11.40 a.m., No. 70, another northbound second class train was also due to arrive at that point.

At the time of the accident Extra 2427 was running against both of these trains, in a heavy fog, without orders against them and without any protection.

Conductor Deren thought that the message which was given him at Forrest authorized him to proceed against superior trains without the protection of a flagman. The last sentence

of the message reads:

"Run very carefully prepared to stop if  
any trains coming north show up."

This would appear to indicate that the dispatcher himself did not expect the extra to send a flagman ahead. The fact that they were permitted to leave Forrest on the time of opposing superior train No. 64 without orders against them, when orders could have been given, served to strengthen their belief.

Train Dispatcher McGrath is at fault in starting extra 2427 out of Forrest at the time he did, having full knowledge of the conditions obtaining along the line, and this is especially true in view of the fact that by holding them at Forrest for an hour and a half he could have run them as a section of 1st class train passenger train No. 15. He permitted Extra 2427 to leave Forrest, its initial station, on the time of train No. 64 on the verbal statement of the operator at Forrest, that all northbound trains were being held at Strawn. A wire was working as far as Strawn, and there is no reason why he could not have given extra 2427 a train order against No. 64 as far as Strawn, or possibly as far as Sibley. The message he gave Extra 2427 was easily susceptible of the interpretation placed upon it by the train crew, and the fact that he instructed the operator at Strawn to let Extra 2427 go when he was unable to communicate with the operator at Sibley, all indicate a lack of a proper realization of the responsibility which rests upon a train

dispatcher for the safe operation of trains. 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.

After the accident a public telephone located in the station at Sibley was used to communicate with the operator at Gibson City. Had this telephone been used the presence of train No. 64 in the block would undoubtedly have been discovered and the accident could have been prevented. Operator Koehler at Sibley used poor judgment in allowing Extra 2427 to proceed until he had exhausted every means within his power to communicate with the operator at Gibson City to ascertain the condition of the block.

All of the employees involved in this accident were experienced men and at the time of the accident, the crew of Extra 2427 had been on duty two hours and the crew of No. 64 had been on duty three hours.