

IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE OREGON-WASHINGTON RAILROAD & NAVIGATION COMPANY NEAR HURON, OREGON, ON MAY 3, 1920

On May 3, 1920, there was a head-end collision between a passenger train and a light engine on the line of the Oregon-Washington Railroad & Navigation Company near Huron, Oregon, which resulted in the death of 1 employee, and the injury of 8 passengers and 7 employees. After investigation of this accident the Chief of the Bureau of Safety reports as follows:

The accident occurred on the Second District of the Second Division, a single-track line extending between La Grande and Reith, Oregon, a distance of 78.3 miles. Trains are operated by time-table, train orders transmitted by telegraph and telephone, and an automatic block-signal system.

The accident occurred at a point 5,444 feet west of the depot at Huron. Approaching this point from the west there is a tangent of about 1,400 feet, followed by a curve of 6 degree 14' to the right, 913.3 feet in length; the accident occurred near the western end of this curve. Approaching from the east there are several short curves and tangents, followed by a 5-degree 10-minutes curve to the right 855.5 feet long, then 228.4 feet of tangent leading to the curve on which the accident occurred. The grade is 1.5 per cent descending for westbound trains. The vision of the engineman of an eastbound train is limited to about 225 feet.

Eastbound and westbound home signals 266.7 located on opposite sides of the track at the west end of Huron passing track 1,517 feet west of Huron station and 3,927 feet east of the point of accident. At a point 1,740 feet west of signal 266.7 is eastbound distant signal 266.2 Eastbound intermediate signal 264.6 is located 6,189 feet west of the point of accident. The weather at the time of the accident was clear.

Eastbound passenger train No. 20 consisted of 1 combination mail and baggage car, 1 smoking car, and 1 day coach, all of wooden construction, hauled by engine 3227, and was in charge of Conductor Fergus and Engineman Symons. It left Duncan at 10.37 a.m., 3 minutes late, passed Camp, a blind siding 3.6 miles west of Huron, at about 10.49 a.m., 1 minute late, and at about 10.56 a.m. collided with extra 2171 at a point approximately 1 mile west of Huron while traveling at an estimated speed of 12 miles an hour.

Westbound extra 2171 was a light engine in charge of Engineman Hamilton. Extra 2171 followed extra 3801, also a light engine, into Huron; extra 3801 took siding at Huron for train No. 20, which was due at 10.56 a.m., but extra 2171 continued west on the main line to the depot, arriving there at 10.50 a.m. After receiving a copy of a train order which was not involved in this accident, extra 2171 departed at about 10.53 a.m., and collided with train No. 20 while traveling at a speed of about 30 miles an hour.

Engine 3227 was practically destroyed, the boiler being torn from the frame, and the cylinders, cylinder saddles and engine and trailer truck frames broken. The rear end of the combination car and the front end of the smoking car were damaged. Engine 2171 was badly damaged, the cylinders, cylinder saddles and engine frame being broken, and the boiler driven back about 8 inches from its original position. The employee killed was the fireman of the passenger train.

Engineman Symons of train No. 20, was unable to say how far extra 2171 was from his

train when he first saw it. He immediately applied the air brakes in emergency and thought he had reduced the speed from 30 miles an hour to about 7 or 8 miles an hour at the time of the accident. Conductor Fergus and Brakeman O'Sullivan estimated that after the brakes were applied the train ran a distance of about 2 or 3 car-lengths before the accident occurred, at which time the speed had been reduced to about 12 miles an hour. After receiving the train order at Huron, Engineman Hamilton boarded engine 2171, handed the order to the fireman, and told him that they had to look out for trains Nos. 20 and 24 and extra 2162. Engineman Hamilton looked at his time-table and according to his own statement told the fireman that train No. 20 was due at North Fork at 11.40 a.m. and at Camp at 11.48 a.m., when as a matter of fact the time of these trains at these stations is 10.42 a.m. and 10.48 a.m. respectively. He said that signal 266.7 was in the clear position and called its indication to the fireman. Shortly afterwards the fireman asked him to repeat the time of train No. 20, at the same time getting out his own time-table and started to examine it. While he was doing this Engineman Hamilton saw train No. 20 approaching and made an emergency application of the air brakes. According to the fireman, after the engineman looked at his time-table and said they had time enough to go to Camp for train No. 20 he began to work on the fire and did not see the indication of signal 266.7. When they were about opposite eastbound distant signal 266.2, he looked at his watch, and began to examine his own time-table to check up the time train No. 20 was due at Camp. When he first saw train No. 20 approaching it was about 3 passenger car-lengths distant. Investigation developed the fact that it was customary among passenger engineman to note the time at which they pass intermediate signal 264.6 eastbound, figuring that if they pass this signal within a few minutes of their time-table schedule they will be on time at the top of the grade at 17.2 miles east of Camp. Engineman Symons said his train passed the signal at 10.52 a.m., which is verified by the statements of the train crew that they passed Camp at about 10.49 a.m. or 10.50 a.m. The time Engineman Symons said he passed intermediate signal 264.6 was 1 minute before the train order issued to Engineman Hamilton at Huron was made complete. Inasmuch as the control circuits of signal 266.7 extended westward a distance of 12,337 feet or 2,221 feet west of intermediate signal 264.6, it is clear that signal 266.7 should have been in the stop position at the time it was passed by extra 2171. Engineman Hamilton claimed that it was in the clear position, while its indication was not noticed by his fireman, the engine crew of extra 3801, or the operator at Huron, although the operator and the engineman of extra 3801 noticed that the signal was displaying a stop indication after extra 2171 had passed it. The signal boxes were sealed on the day of the accident and careful examination of the signal system between Huron and Camp was made on the following day, but nothing was found which could have caused a false clear indication.

This accident was caused by an error of Engineman Hamilton of extra 2171 in reading the time-table, and by his failure to be governed by an automatic block-signal indication. Engineman Hamilton admitted that he looked at his time-table and read the time of train No. 20 at Camp as 10.48 a.m., whereas the correct time was 11:48 a.m.; he offered no explanation or excuse for this error. The evidence does not support his contention that signal 266.7 was in the clear position at the time his engine passed it. The train order which he received at Huron was made complete at 10.53 a.m. and it is doubtful if his engine passed signal 266.7 before 10.54 a.m. The control for this signal extends 8,410 feet west of the point of accident; had extra 2171 passed this signal before train No. 20 entered upon these control circuits, it would have been necessary for train No. 20 to have traveled this

distance of more than 1 1/2 miles, part of which is on a heavy ascending grade with many curves, within a minute or a minute and a half, while extra 2171, a light engine, was traveling down grade the distance of 2,927 feet from signal 266.7 to the point of accident. This is not supported by the weight of evidence and is obviously incredible. Furthermore, the investigation failed to develop any defects in the signal system, and it is therefore believed that this signal was in the stop position at the time extra 2171 passed it, the stop indication for some reason not being observed or obeyed by Engineman Hamilton.

Engineman Hamilton was employed as a fireman in 1911 and promoted to engineman in 1918. He was disciplined in January, 1920, for responsibility in connection with a derailment. At the time of the accident Engineman Hamilton had been on duty about 4 1/2 hours after about 14 hours off duty.