

IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE OREGON SHORT LINE RAILROAD, UNION PACIFIC SYSTEM, AT NUGGET, WYO., ON SEPTEMBER 22, 1929.

On September 22, 1929, there was a rear-end collision between a freight train and a light engine on the Oregon Short Line Railroad, Union Pacific System, at Nugget, Wyo., resulting in the death of one employee.

Location and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on the First Subdivision of the Utah Division, extending between Granger, Wyo., and Montpelier, Ida., a distance of 115 miles; in the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table, train orders, and an automatic block-signal system. The passing track at Nugget, on which the accident occurred, at a point 1,897 feet from the east switch, is 4,733 feet in length and parallels the main track on the south. Approaching the point of accident from the east, beginning at the turnout, the passing track is tangent for a distance of 1,186 feet, following which there is a 4° 51' curve to the right 1,350 feet in length, the accident occurring on this curve at a point 447 feet from its eastern end. There is another passing track which parallels the main track on the north. The grade for westbound trains is slightly descending.

Under the rules, trains using a siding must proceed with caution, expecting to find it occupied by other trains, while under instructions contained in Consolidated Superintendent's Bulletin Orders No. 3, revised to January 28, 1929, trainmen and enginemen will be held responsible for striking cars on sidings or for damage done in making emergency stop to avoid striking cars. If view is obstructed, brakemen must be sent ahead.

The markers of a caboose standing at the point of accident are plainly visible from the cab of a westbound engine, making a back-up movement, for a distance of more than 2,500 feet, and while these lights remain in constant view from the fireman's side, nevertheless, on account of the curve, it can not be definitely determined upon which track a caboose is standing until within a short distance of it. The view from the engineman's side is obstructed intermittently until the engine backs in on the passing track, at the east switch; the caboose markers then can be seen from the engineman's side for a distance of 539 feet, after which they pass out of the engineman's line of vision, the marker on the south side again coming into view of the engineman when he is about 90 feet from it.

The weather was cloudy at the time of the accident, which occurred about 11:45 p.m.

Description

Westbound freight train extra 2553 consisted of 57 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 2553, and was in charge of Conductor Gardner and Engineman Powell. On arrival at Nugget, at about 11:25 p.m., extra 2553 headed in at the east switch of the passing track in order to meet eastbound freight train extra 5084, and while standing on the passing track the rear end of the caboose was struck by light engine 2549.

Light engine 2549, of the 2-8-2-type, headed east, was in charge of Engineman Carrington and Fireman Huggins. The tender, rectangular in shape, was equipped with a headlight on the rear end of the cistern. This engine was engaged in helper service, had assisted two eastbound trains from Nugget to Tunnel, a distance of 12.7 miles, and was returning to Nugget in order to assist extra 5084 to Tunnel, but while making a back-up movement through the passing track it collided with extra 2553 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 12 and 15 miles per hour.

The caboose of extra 2553 was demolished and the rear truck of the adjacent car was derailed. The rear truck of the tender of engine 2549 was derailed and the engine itself was slightly damaged. The employee killed was a road foreman of engines, who was in the caboose at the time of the accident.

Summary of Evidence

Conductor Gardner, of extra 2553, stated that as his train headed in at the east switch, he stood on the rear platform of the caboose to watch the flagman close the switch. When his train came to a stop, at about 11:32 p.m., the indicator lamps and the markers on the caboose were burning, but the cupola lamp was out, having a leaky fount; the markers were displaying red indications to the rear, it having been neglected to turn them. There was also a lighted red lamp just inside the rear door of the caboose. He was on the north side of his train and about two car-lengths west of his caboose at the time light engine 2549 approached, backing up at a speed of about 15 or 20 miles per hour, with the headlight on the rear of the tender burning brightly. On definitely realizing that the engine was going to back into his caboose, he immediately ran toward the approaching engine, with his flagman right behind him, and reached a point from two to six car-lengths east of the caboose; he said he shouted a warning of danger, and saw the fireman on the deck of the engine, and that the fireman dropped his shove and jumped to the window on hearing, them shout, the collision occurring immediately afterwards. Conductor Gardner further stated that he did not have a lantern with him, but that the flagman did have one, and he said that he did not think he could have crossed over to the south side of the passing track in safety, in order to give a warning of danger on the engineman's side of the light engine. After the accident the conductor climbed aboard the light engine and he said that at that time the fireman asked him whether the markers were burning, and he informed the fireman that they were, and were displaying red to the rear.

Flagman Robinson, of extra 2553, stated that when his train came to a stop on the passing track, he left the caboose and walked ahead along the south side of the train a distance of about 25 or 30 car-lengths, looking over the brakes, brake beams, journals, etc., crossed over to the north side of the train, and then came back to the caboose. He saw light engine 2549 approaching, and on definitely realizing that something was wrong, by which time the rear headlight on the tender was shining brightly in his face, he ran toward the approaching engine on the fireman's side, saying that he did not have time to cross over to the engineman's side in safety, waving stop signals with his electric lantern and shouting, but to no avail; he thought he had reached a point about 30 or 40 feet from the caboose when the collision occurred. The statements of Flagman Robinson as to the actions of the fireman of light engine 2549, immediately prior to the accident, were similar to those of Conductor Gardner. Flagman Robinson further stated that he did not turn the markers

when his train went in on the passing track as he thought his train would depart in a short time and that he might be down along the train looking it over and would not have time to turn them back again. The markers were not removed from their brackets while the train was on the passing track, being in place, lighted, and displaying red indications to the rear.

Engineman Carrington, of light engine 2549, stated that after closing the east switch, the fireman climbed upon the head brakeman's seat box and faced towards the tender, remaining there all the time, while the engineman sat on his own seat box facing in the same direction, leaning on the arm rest, with his head out of the window. The light engine was moving down the passing track under control, at a speed of about 12 or 15 miles per hour, and his fireman shouted "all clear", this being about eight seconds before the collision occurred. The air brakes were in proper condition, but he did not apply them until the crash occurred, not having been given any warning of danger and it was the engineman's opinion that he could have stopped without difficulty had he been warned. Engineman Carrington further stated that the fireman he had on this occasion, Fireman Huggins, had only worked with him for three days, and while he did not know how long the fireman had been in the service, yet he appeared to be competent, and he expressed the opinion that provided the caboose markers were burning and displaying red indications to the rear, it would have led the fireman to believe that extra 2553 was standing on the main track instead of the passing track. Engineman Carrington was unable to explain his own failure to notice the markers of extra 2553 while on the main track or while backing through the east end of the passing track.

Fireman Huggins, of light engine 2549, had had about 81 days' experience as a road fireman and had been in helper service for three days at the time of the accident. He stated that after he closed the switch, he climbed upon the engine and sat on the head brakeman's seat box and looked out of the window, facing the direction in which the engine was moving, and although keeping a lookout continuously, yet he was unaware of anything wrong until the collision occurred. He did not see anyone, or a light of any kind, except the caution indication of a block signal governing the movement of a train on the main track, which signal is located on the north side of the tracks and about 250 feet west of where the collision occurred, and he denied having been on the deck of the engine, as claimed by the conductor and flagman of extra 2553. Engineman Carrington had instructed him to be particularly careful when making a backup movement on this passing track, as it might be occupied by a train, and he said that just prior to the collision he informed Engineman Carrington that everything was clear. Fireman Huggins further stated that at the time his engine was assisting the last eastbound train, extra 2553 was passed in the vicinity of Fossil, 5.7 miles east of Nugget, in double-track territory, and that he looked back and saw the markers burning on extra 2553, and he said it was reasonable to presume that they were still burning when extra 2553 came to a stop on the passing track; he could offer no plausible excuse for not having seen the caboose.

Tests made subsequent to the accident disclosed that even with no lights displayed on the caboose as it stood on the curve at the point of accident, it could have been distinctly seen for a distance of 372 feet from the fireman's side of the cab of the light engine, by means of the rays of the headlight on the rear of the tender. At no time while backing around the curve did the view of the caboose pass out of vision from the fireman's side, nor did the rays of the rear headlight fail to shine upon and distinctly outline the caboose.

Conclusions

This accident was caused primarily by the failure of Fireman Huggins, of light engine 2549, to maintain a proper lookout and to give warning of a caboose ahead while making a back-up movement on a passing track.

The testimony is to the effect that the markers on the caboose of extra 2553 were burning, but that it had been neglected to turn them after the caboose entered the siding, with the result that they displayed red indications to the rear. Such an indication usually means that the caboose is on the main track, and while this might have misled the engineman and fireman of engine 2549 had they noticed the markers, yet it does not explain their total failure to see the markers at any time, nor does it explain why Fireman Huggins should have notified the engineman, at a time when the engineman's view was obscured, that the track was clear, particularly in view of the fact that the caboose could have been seen a distance of 372 feet, even had no markers been displayed. The conductor and flagman of extra 2553 said Fireman Huggins was on the deck of the engine; if this was the case, not only is it ample explanation for the fireman's failure to note that the way was not clear, but Engineman Carrington then would be equally responsible because of his action in continuing the back-up movement under such circumstances.

Fireman Huggins was employed as a road fireman on October 24, 1928, was relieved from duty on November 23, 1928, and was recalled, on August 27, 1929; Engineman Carrington had had 17 years' experience as an engineman. At the time of the accident, Fireman Huggins and Engineman Carrington had been on duty about 8 hours and 30 minutes, prior to which they had been off duty about 12 hours; none of the other employees involved had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law.