

IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH
OCCURRED ON THE WABASH RAILWAY NEAR
TILTON, ILL., ON JUNE 28, 1920.

On June 28, 1920, there was a collision between a passenger train and a cut of standing cars on the Wabash Railway at Tilton, Ill., which resulted in the death of 1 employee and the injury of 1 employee. After investigation of this accident the Chief of the Bureau of Safety reports as follows:

This accident occurred on that part of the Peru Division which extends between Tilton, Ill., and Peru, Ind., and in the vicinity of the point of accident is a double-track line over which trains are operated by time-table, train-orders, and a manual block-signal system. The point of accident is within yard limits, about 2,000 feet west of the yard office at Tilton; about 3,000 feet west of the point of accident is a crossover connecting the two main tracks. Approaching the point of accident from the west the track is tangent for more than 2 miles; the grade varies, but for the most part is slightly descending. The weather at the time of the accident was clear.

Eastbound passenger train No. 2 consisted of 1 mail car, 1 express car, 1 baggage car, 1 coach, 1 chair car, 1 cafe car, and 6 Pullman sleeping cars, hauled by engine 675, and was in charge of Conductor Fickhouse and Engineer Stewart. At Tolono, Ill., 34.1 miles west of Tilton, the crew received copies of train orders Nos. 90, 92, and 95, of which only train order No. 92 is involved in this accident. This order read as follows:

"Eastbound main track blocked east of west crossover Tilton."

A message was also delivered to the crew which read in part as follows:

"Yardmaster Tilton will back you over at west crossover and run you down westbound main."

At Ryan, 9.4 miles from Tilton, a caution order was received directing the crew of train No. 2 to "proceed cautiously from Ryan to Tilton expecting to find extra 2455 east in block." Extra 2455 had arrived at Tilton at about 8.30 p.m., and on account of the congested condition of the yard 46 cars from this train were left on the eastbound main track, the caboose being taken off. Train No. 2 passed Ryan at 11:02 p.m. according to the train sheet and approached Tilton at a speed of about 30 miles an hour, passed the west crossover without stopping, and at about 11:10 p.m. collided with the cut of 46 cars on the eastbound track.

Engine 675 was derailed and considerably damaged. With the exception of the forward truck of the first car, none of the cars of train No. 2 was derailed and only slight damage was sustained by them. As a result of the accident, and of a fire which broke out in the wreckage, 8 of the freight cars were destroyed. The employee killed was the engineer of train No. 2.

The statements of Fireman Volpert of train No. 2 indicated that both he and Engineer Stewart understood the arrangement for handling their train at Tilton. On the tangent track approaching Tilton, Engineer Stewart remarked that he did not see anything of the extra and shortly afterward the engineer asked the fireman if he could see any sign of a yard engine at the west crossover to take care of train No. 2, to which the fireman replied in the negative. Fireman Volpert said that the engineer then shut off steam and made an application of the air brakes, this being when the train was about 1 or 1-1/2 miles west of the west crossover. The fireman saw a switchlight on the westbound main track and then began to put in a fire so that he would be able to watch for signals when making the backup movement through the crossover. After completing this work the fireman looked ahead and saw nothing of the switchlights; he then looked back to see if the engine had passed, but could see nothing on account of smoke blowing down the ^{center} of the train. On looking ahead again he saw the headlight of his engine shining on the cars which were standing on the track, about 1 or 2 car-lengths distant. Engineer Stewart apparently saw the cars at about the same time, as it was at this time that he made an emergency application of the air brakes, no release having been made after the first application. Fireman Volpert said that the light on the east crossover switch was not burning and that this probably caused the engineer to run by. He also said that the headlight of engine 675 did not illuminate the track much more than 5 car-lengths, and the fact that the five cars on the west end of the cut were flat cars made it difficult to see them.

Conductor Flankhouse was in the forward end of the coach when he felt an application of the air brakes. He then went to the platform, opened the trap door and got down on the lower step, at about which time the accident occurred; he did not know that the train had passed the west crossover. He supposed that the movement would be handled the same as on the preceding night, when his train had been flagged with a fusee and a red lantern and the yard crew had piloted the train through the yard. According to the conductor, both he and the engineer understood thoroughly how their train was to be handled at Tilton and the conductor said that at no time had any information been received indicating that the east-bound main track would be clear east of the west crossover. Brakeman Snedeker was standing on the rear end of the train when it passed the west crossover at a speed estimated by him to have been about 20 miles an hour. According to his

statement the brakes were applied approaching the crossover, but were released and the train allowed to drift after passing the crossover.

Operator Wheatley, on duty at Tilton until 11.00 p. m. had, at the request of the yardmaster, notified the dispatcher at about 8.25 p. m. that the eastbound main track would be blocked until about 1.00 a. m., but nothing was said by any of these employees about the caboose having been removed from the rear end of extra 2455. Operator Wheatley heard the dispatcher issue train order No. 92 to train No. 2 at Tolono, and also heard the message which informed the crew of that train that the yardmaster would run train No. 2 through the west crossover and down the westbound track. He said the message was not addressed to any one at Tilton and that he did not make a copy of it, but gave the information verbally, to Yardmaster Arland, just before going off duty, and the yardmaster told him that he was going to flag at the east crossover.

Yardmaster Arland said his place was at the east end flagging westbound trains while train No. 2 was moving against the current of traffic, and that he therefore lined up the east crossover switches and sent out a switchman to flag westbound trains. He understood the dispatcher intended that he should handle the movement of train No. 2 at the west crossover, but said it was impossible for him to do this under the circumstances as his proper place was at the east crossover. Yardmaster Arland said it was a common occurrence to operate trains against the current of traffic at Tilton, on account of the congested condition of the yard at that point, and train No. 2 had frequently been operated in that manner, he said that neither he nor ^{except} of the yard force had assisted in making these detours/ or flagging at the east end of the yard, this train backing over through the west crossover without assistance from the yard force. It was not an unusual occurrence to leave cars standing on the eastbound main line at this point, without markers or flag protection, after the dispatcher had been notified that the track was blocked.

The crew of the yard engine at Tilton goes off duty at Danville at 11.00 p. m. Danville is 2.2 miles from Tilton and the crew going off duty takes the engine to Danville, where the relieving crew goes on duty and takes the engine back to Tilton. However, Switchman Cunningham who lives at Tilton, came on duty at about 10.30 p. m., and at the yardmaster's direction he was stationed at the east end of the yard to protect the movement of train No. 2 through the yard. Switchman Draper who also lives at Tilton, and who goes to Danville with the switch engine when crews are changed, came on duty at about 10.40 p. m., but nothing was said to him about remaining there to assist in detouring train No. 2.

Dispatcher Helm stated the operator at Tilton asked him to notify No. 2 that the eastbound main track at Tilton was blocked and that one yardmaster would back No. 2 over at the west crossover and handle on the westbound main. He accordingly issued a 31-order that the track was blocked and sent a message to the crew of train No. 2 advising them how their train would be handled at Tilton. He stated that train No. 2 was detoured in this manner almost every night during the month of June.

The investigation developed that both switch lights at the west crossover were burning properly immediately after the accident, the electric headlight on engine 675 was tested before train No. 2 left Decatur and left that point in good condition.

Rule No. 28 of the special rules of the Wabash Railroad Company reads as follows:

"Switching limits at stations where switch engines work are designated by yard limit boards. All trains will run carefully within yard limits, expecting to find main track obstructed."

According to the train sheet record, train No. 2 passed Ryan at 11:02 p.m., notwithstanding the caution card received at that point, the record indicates this train proceeded through the block at full speed, traveling the distance of approximately nine miles in about eight minutes; and it proceeded past the crossover without heeding the order stating that the track beyond that point was blocked.

This accident was caused by train No. 2 not being operated under proper control as required by the rules and by a train order stating that the track was blocked, for which Engineman Stewart and Conductor Finkhouse are responsible. A contributing cause was the failure of Yardmaster Arland to carry out the dispatcher's instructions relative to detouring train No. 2 which were communicated to him verbally by the operator.

While it is probable the message from the dispatcher which accompanied train order No. 92 led the crew of train No. 2 to expect that the yardmaster or a switchman would be found at the west crossover, the fact that train No. 2 was not flagged at that point, and that there was no train in view blocking the eastbound track, does not relieve the engineman of responsibility for disregarding the order. Had the conductor been properly attending to his duties he should have discovered that his train had passed the crossover switch.

Yardmaster Arland was in charge of Tilton yard and

should have taken all necessary precautions for safely decoupling the passenger train without a message or instructions from the dispatcher. As he had sent a switchman to the east end of the yard to flag opposing trains there is no reason apparent why he could not have flagged train No. 2 at the west crossover in accordance with the dispatcher's message.

All of the employees involved in this accident were experienced men, and none of them was on duty contrary to the provisions of the hours of service law.