INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

WASHINGTON

REPORT NO. 3727

THE CENTRAL RAILROAD COMPANY OF NEW JERSEY

IN RE ACCIDENT

NEAR SUGAR NOTCH, PA., ON

DECEMBER 20, 1956

SUMMARY

Date:	December 20, 1956	
Railroad:	Central of New Jersey	
Location:	Sugar Notch, Pa.	
Kind of accident:	Head-end collision	
Equipment involved:	Locomotive with caboose	: Locomotive with 1 Diesel-electric unit and caboose
Locomotive numbers:	Diesel-electric unit 1544	: Diesel-electric unit 1081
Consists:	Caboose	: 1 Diesel-electric unit and caboose
Estimated speeds:	Standing	: 8-10 m. p. h.
Operation:	Operating rules; yard limits	
Track:	Single; 1°15' curve; 1.20 percent ascending grade westward	
Weather:	Cloudy	
Time:	5:15 p. m.	
Casualties:	1 killed; 1 injured	
Cause:	Failure properly to control the speed of the eastbound movement while moving within yard limits	

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT NO. 3727

IN THE MATTER OF MAKING ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION REPORTS UNDER THE ACCIDENT REPORTS ACT OF MAY 6, 1910.

THE CENTRAL RAILROAD COMPANY OF NEW JERSEY

January 31, 1957

Accident near Sugar Notch, Pa., on December 20, 1956, caused by failure properly to control the speed of the eastbound movement while moving within yard limits

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REPORT OF THE COMMISSION[1]

TUGGLE, Commissioner:

On December 20, 1956, there was a head-end collision between a locomotive handling a caboose and a locomotive handling a Diesel-electric unit and caboose on the line of the Central Railroad Company of New Jersey near Sugar Notch, Pa., which resulted in the death of one train-service employee, and the injury of one train-service employee.

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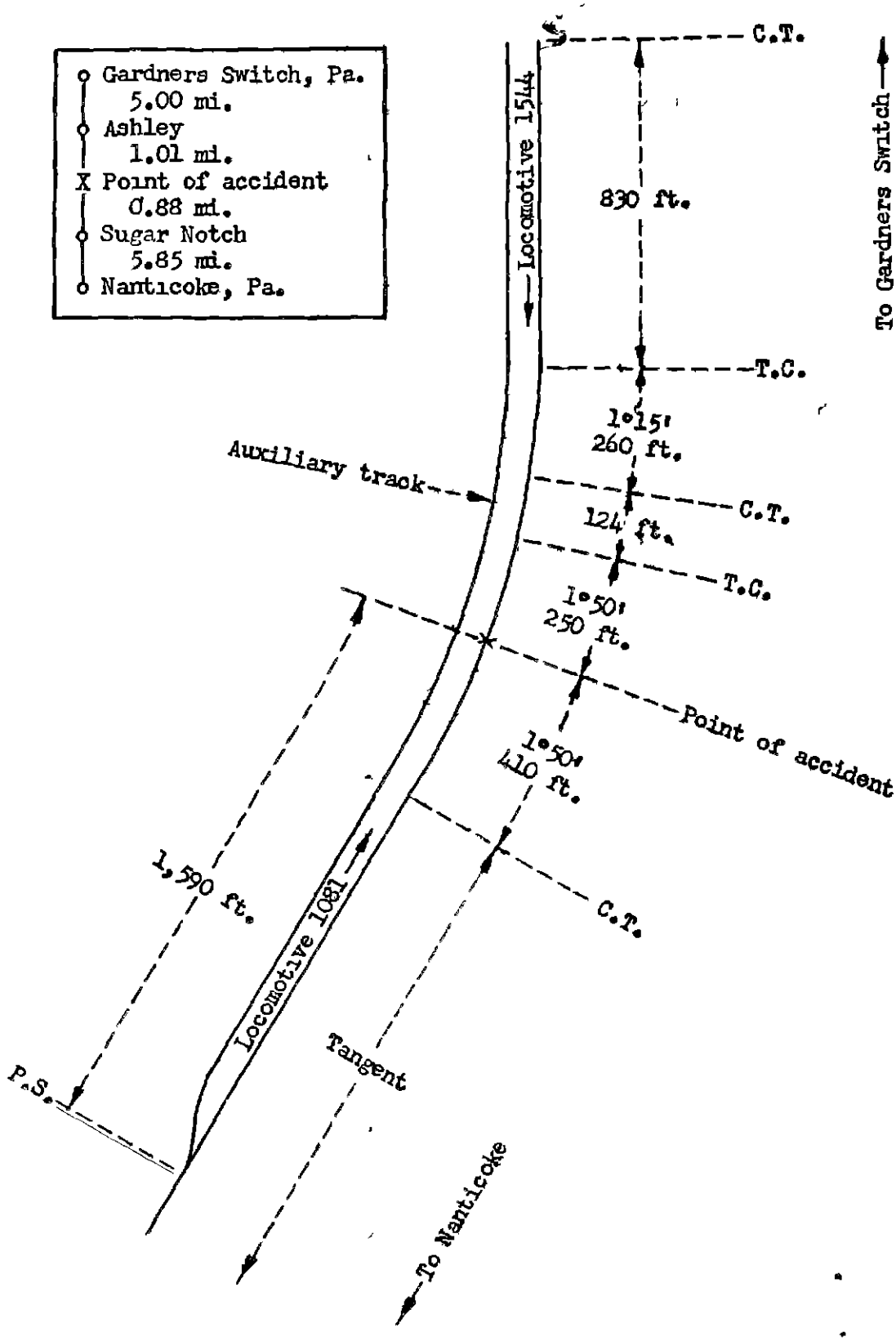
[1] Under authority of section 17 (2) of the Interstate Commerce Act the above-entitled proceeding was referred by the Commission to Commissioner Tuggle for consideration and disposition.



Report No. 3727
The Central Railroad Company of New Jersey
Sugar Notch, Pa.
December 20, 1956

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Pennsylvania Division extending between Gardners Switch and Nanticoke, Pa., 12.74 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line, over which trains are operated under the rules governing movements within yard limits. There is no block system in use. Yard limits extend between Gardners Switch and a point 7.76 miles west of Gardners Switch. The accident occurred on the main track at a point 6.01 miles west of Gardners Switch and 0.88 mile east of Sugar Notch. From the east there are, in succession, a tangent 830 feet in length, a 1°15' curve to the right 260 feet, a tangent 124 feet, and a 1°50' curve to the right 250 feet to the point of accident and 410 feet westward. From the west there is a tangent over 1,000 feet in length and the curve on which the accident occurred. The grade is 1.20 percent ascending westward at the point of accident.

In the vicinity of the point of accident an auxiliary track parallels the main track on the north. At the time of the accident this track was occupied by a cut of hopper cars.

This carrier's operating rules read in part as follows:

DEFINITIONS

Yard Speed.--A speed that will permit stopping within one-half the range of vision.

S-93(a). Within yard limits the main track may be used, clearing first and second class trains as prescribed by the rules, or protecting * * *, but not protecting against other trains or engines. Trains and engines, other than first and second class trains, within yard limits must not exceed yard speed, unless the main track is known to be clear. * * *

103(a). When pushing cars, other than when switching or making up trains in yards, a member of crew will take a conspicuous position on leading end to govern and protect movement. * * *

The maximum authorized speed for freight trains in the vicinity of the point of accident is 15 miles per hour.

Description of Accident

About 5:05 p. m. Diesel-electric locomotive 1544 departed west-bound from Ashley, 5.00 miles west of Gardners Switch. The locomotive was headed eastward and was pushing a caboose. It was stopped on the main track at a point 1.01 miles west of Ashley and 4,646 feet east of Sugar Notch. Several seconds later it was struck by an east-bound movement.

An east-bound movement consisting, from east to west, of Diesel-electric locomotive 1609, Diesel-electric locomotive 1081, and a caboose departed from Sugar Notch about 5:10 p. m. The engine in locomotive 1609 was shut down, and the movement was being handled by locomotive 1081. While this movement was proceeding eastward at an estimated speed of 8 or 10 miles per hour it struck the caboose being handled by locomotive 1544. The accident occurred 1,590 feet east of the switch at which the east-bound movement entered the main track.

The east end of the caboose being handled by locomotive 1544 was derailed and stopped against the side of a car on the auxiliary track north of the main track. The caboose was somewhat damaged, and locomotive 1544 was slightly damaged.

One brakeman of the crew of locomotive 1544 was killed. The engineer of this crew was injured.

The weather was cloudy, and it was dark at the time of the accident, which occurred about 5:15 p. m.

Locomotive 1609 is of the road-switcher type, and locomotive 1081 is of the switcher type. In the direction of movement at the time of the accident the control compartment of locomotive 1609 was near the east end of the unit. The control compartment of locomotive 1081 was at the west end of that unit.

Discussion

About 25 minutes before the accident occurred the yardmaster at Ashley instructed the conductor of locomotive 1081, which was then at Ashley, to move locomotive 1609 from Sugar Notch to the engine house at Ashley. About 15 minutes later he instructed the conductor of locomotive 1544 to go to Sugar Notch and return with coal from a tipple at that point. He also instructed the conductor to watch for locomotive 1081 returning from Sugar Notch with locomotive 1609.

Locomotive 1081 moved from Ashley to Sugar Notch with the caboose coupled to the west end of the locomotive. The crew coupled the locomotive to the west end of locomotive 1609, which was headed westward at the west end of an occupied track, and after the brakes had been tested the movement entered the main track. As the eastward movement was started the enginemen were in their respective positions in the control compartment of locomotive 1081, the two brakemen entered the control compartment of locomotive 1609, and the conductor boarded the caboose. There were no lights on locomotive 1609, and the headlight of locomotive 1081 was dimmed. As this movement was approaching the point where the accident occurred the speed was 8 or 10 miles per hour, as estimated by the members of the crew. Because of curvature of the track and the length of the locomotives, the engineer was unable to see the track ahead of the first locomotive. He said that he could see one of the brakemen, who was on the fireman's side of the control compartment of locomotive 1609, but he could not see his lantern. The view of the track ahead from the other employees' positions on the locomotives was restricted by the cars on the auxiliary track north of the main track. One of the brakemen said that he first saw the opposing movement at a distance which he thought was about 200 feet. He called a warning, and the other brakeman, who was on the fireman's side of the control compartment, said that he gave stop signals through the window in front of the fireman's seat with his lantern. The engineer did not see these signals. When the brakeman saw that the speed was not being reduced he sounded a warning on the horn. The engineer then made an emergency application of the brakes. The collision occurred almost immediately afterward. There is an emergency brake valve in the control compartment of locomotive 1609, but this valve was not used by either of the brakemen.

As locomotive 1544 was approaching the point where the accident occurred the enginemen were in the control compartment of the locomotive. The conductor and two brakemen were on the platform at the west end of the caboose. The fireman, a qualified engineer, was operating the locomotive. The speed was 8 or 10 miles per hour, as estimated by members of the crew. The headlight was lighted brightly. The conductor and the surviving brakeman said that they first saw the opposing movement at a distance which they thought was from 350 feet to 450 feet. One of the brakemen immediately gave stop signals to the engineer, and the other brakeman opened the emergency brake valve. When the engineer saw the signals he called a warning, and the fireman applied the independent brake at approximately the same time that the brakes became applied in emergency. The engineer said that he then saw the tops of the opposing locomotives at a distance which he thought

was about 600 feet. The surviving employees said that their movement was stopped several seconds before the collision occurred. The conductor and the surviving brakeman said that the lanterns of the three employees on the caboose were lighted and that all of them gave stop signals from the time they saw the opposing movement until the time the collision occurred.

This accident occurred within yard limits, and under the rules of this carrier the speed of both movements was required to be so controlled that they could be stopped within one-half the range of vision.

Cause

This accident was caused by failure properly to control the speed of the east-bound movement while moving within yard limits.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this thirty-first day of January, 1957.

By the Commission, Commissioner Tuggle.

(SEAL)

HAROLD D. McCOY,

Secretary.