Inv-2052

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

WASHINGTON

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR

BUREAU OF SAFETY

ACCIDENT ON THE

DELAWARE, LACKAWANNA & WESTERN

ELMIRA, N. Y.

MARCH 18, 1936

INVESTIGATION NO. 2052

SUMMARY

Railroad:	Delaware, Lackawanna & Western		
Date:	March 18, 1936		
Location:	Elmira, N. Y.		
Kind of accident:	Yard collision		
Trains involved:	Switch engine	:	Light engine
Engine numbers:	228	:	793
Speed:	1 m.p.h.	:	4-6 m.p.h.
Track:	Ash pit track; yard limits		
Weather:	Dense fog, together with steam and smoke from other engines in vicinity, as well as from ash pit, materially restricted vision		
Time:	4:05 p.m.		
Casualties:	1 killed; 1 injured		
Cause:	Probable failure to maintain proper lookout; also failure to operate under proper control in view of existing weather conditions.		

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May 14, 1936

To the Commission:

On March 18, 1936, there was a collision between a switch engine and a light engine on the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Railroad at Elmira, N. Y., which resulted in the death of 1 employee and the injury of 1 employee.

Location and method of operation

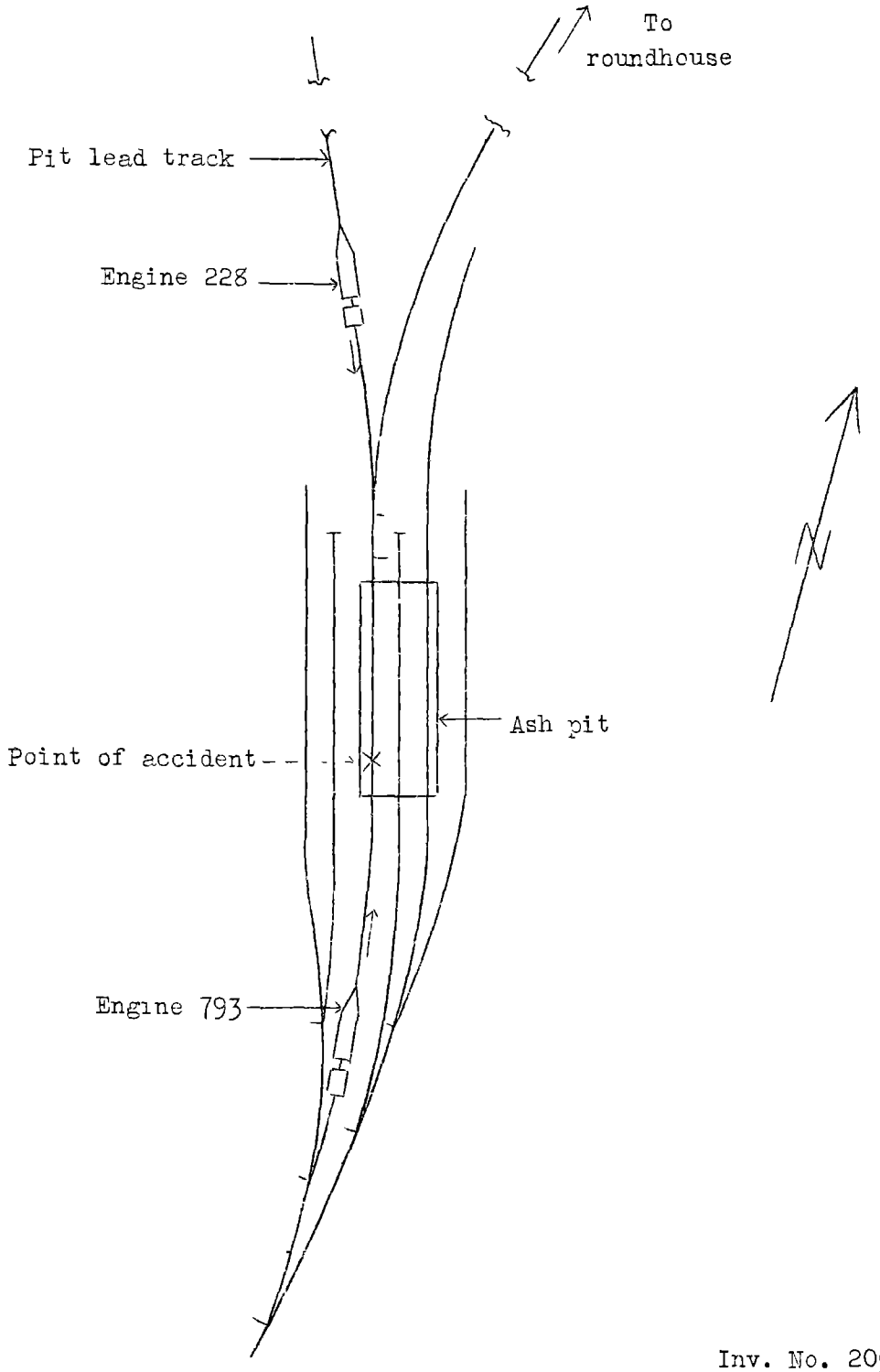
This accident occurred on the Buffalo Division, extending between Buffalo and Elmira, N. Y., a distance of 146.43 miles. At Elmira, the eastern terminal of this division, there are two parallel ash pit tracks, the east pit track and the west pit track; the ash pit is 248.5 feet in length and is located just east of the roundhouse. The accident occurred on the east track of the ash pit, at a point 14 feet from its eastern end. Approaching westward over the east pit track, there is a 4° 45' curve to the left 211 feet in length, followed by 49 feet of tangent to the east end of the ash pit, this tangent extending across the pit and for a short distance beyond it. The grade is 0.62 percent descending westward to the pit, level across it, and then it is 0.16 percent descending. There is a water plug located about 10 feet west of the eastern end of the ash pit, south of the pit.

It was foggy at the time of the accident, which occurred about 4:05 p.m., while smoke and steam from other engines in the vicinity, and also from the ash pit, aided in materially restricting the range of vision.

Description

Light engine 793, headed west, was in charge of Engineman Vetter; it entered the east switch of the east ash pit track and moved westward on that track at a speed estimated to have been between 4 and 6 miles per hour, with Trainman Taylor riding on the right front footboard, it being intended to stop at the extreme western end of the pit. While moving over the ash pit, however, it collided with switch engine 228.

Switch engine 228, headed west, was in charge of Hostler Mack; it was backing eastward over the east ash pit track with the intention of stopping opposite the water plug near the east end of the pit, and was moving at a speed estimated to have been about 1 mile per hour when it collided with light engine 793.



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The rear end of the tender of engine 228 and the front end of engine 793 were damaged more or less by the force of the impact. The employee killed was the trainman on the front end of engine 793, while the employee injured was the fireman of that engine.

Summary of evidence

Engineman Vetter, of light engine 793, stated that Trainman Taylor threw the east switch of the east ash pit track, boarded the right front footboard of the engine, gave a proceed signal, and in addition shouted that everything was clear. The engineman could see as far as the front end of the engine and he figured that the trainman in turn could see ahead a similar distance; the headlight was not burning but the engine bell was ringing. After attaining a speed of about 5 or 6 miles per hour the engineman closed the throttle, and he had the side cab window open and maintained a constant lookout ahead, with his hand on the brake valve, but he could see only the shoulder of the trainman and therefore did not know in which direction the trainman was looking. Engineman Vetter was allowing the engine to drift depending entirely upon the trainman, but said the latter gave no warning of danger and that the first intimation he had of anything wrong was when the accident occurred, at which time the speed was about 4 miles per hour. There was nothing unusual about the movement being made, and the air brakes were in proper working order, but the engineman did not have opportunity to apply them before the accident occurred. Fireman Cowley had just stepped down on the deck of the engine when the accident occurred; he estimated the speed to have been between 4 and 6 miles per hour. Fireman Cowley also said it was customary for engines to move in either direction over the east ash pit track. Engineman Vetter and Fireman Cowley both said that Trainman Taylor had appeared normal in every respect prior to the accident, while the engineman added that at the low rate of speed at which the engine was moving the trainman could have gotten off in safety at any time; also that conditions were so bad that he would have stopped at the east end of the pit if there had not been a man riding on the front footboard.

Hostler Mack stated that engine 228 had been standing a short distance west of the ash pit, on what is known as the lead track to the pit; he boarded the engine, sounded a back-up signal, started the bell, and then backed the engine at a low rate of speed, not exceeding 5 miles per hour. He reduced speed on nearing the switch located immediately west of the pit, saw that it was lined for a movement to the pit, and then worked a light throttle until about two-thirds of the way across the pit; then he closed the throttle and drifted to within about 4 feet of the point where he intended to spot the engine at the water plug, and was moving at a speed of about 1 mile per hour, or less, when the accident occurred. He had served as engine hostler regularly for years at this location and always had in mind the possibility of engines entering the ash

pit from either end, and on this occasion he had been looking back during the course of the entire movement, but the view became worse toward the east end of the ash pit and he did not see engine 793 approaching at any time. The headlight on the tender of his engine was not burning.

Enginehouse Foreman Fernan stated that all men engaged or working on the pit are familiar with conditions and know that the track is liable to be occupied by engines moving in either direction at any time. There is no regulation or restriction against moving engines across the pit when entering from either direction. Judging from the damage resulting from the accident, Foreman Fernan estimated that the speed at the time of impact must have been at least 10 miles per hour, and that engine 793 probably was moving faster than estimated by Engineman Vetter. Foreman Fernan also said it was the practice for trainmen living in the vicinity to ride footboards of engines moving over the pit toward the roundhouse.

Discussion

Under the rules employees are prohibited from riding on engine pilots, but they are not prohibited from riding on front footboards, being permitted to get on only while the engine is stopped. The movements being made over the ash pit track by the engines involved in this accident were of normal character, but the view was so restricted by fog, smoke and steam as to make it difficult to see beyond the front end of an engine, and Engineman Vetter, of engine 793, was depending entirely upon Trainman Taylor, who was on the right front footboard, to warn him of danger; why the trainman did not do so is not known, as he was killed in the accident. Hostler Mack said engine 228 was within a few feet of where it was to be stopped, drifting at a speed of 1 mile per hour, and that he did not see engine 793 approaching.

Conclusion

This accident is believed to have been caused by the failure of the trainman riding on the front footboard of engine 793 to maintain a proper lookout, and by the failure of the engineman of that engine to operate it under proper control in view of the existing weather conditions.

Respectfully submitted,

W. J. PATTERSON,

Director.