

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

WASHINGTON

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REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR

BUREAU OF SAFETY

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ACCIDENT ON THE

DELAWARE, LACKAWANNA & WESTERN RAILROAD

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LITTLE YORK, N. Y.

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DECEMBER 20, 1936

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INVESTIGATION NO. 2129

SUMMARY

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Inv-2129

Railroad: Delaware, Lackawanna & Western  
Date: December 20, 1936  
Location: Little York, N. Y.  
Kind of accident: Side collision  
Trains involved: Freight : Freight  
Train numbers: Extra 2133 North : Extra 1260 South  
Engine numbers: 2133 : 1260  
Consist: 72 cars, caboose : 25 cars, 2 cabooses  
Speed: 6 m.p.h. : 35-40 m.p.h.  
Track: Tangent; slightly ascending grade for south-bound trains  
Weather: Snowing  
Time: 8:15 p.m.  
Casualties: 2 killed; 1 injured  
Cause: Failure properly to protect a cross-over movement; failure properly to observe and obey signal indications

February 24, 1937.

To the Commission:

On December 20, 1936, there was a side collision between 2 freight trains on the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Railroad, at Little York, N. Y., which resulted in the death of 2 employees and the fatal injury of 1 employee.

#### Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Syracuse Division, which extends between Binghamton, N. Y., and Oswego, N. Y., a distance of 114.42 miles; in the vicinity of the point of accident this is a double-track line over which trains are operated by timetable, train orders and an automatic block-signal system. Little York is located 49.94 miles north of Binghamton; a trailing-point cross-over 190 feet in length connects the two main tracks at this station, the north switch being located 725 feet north of the station; a facing-point switch located 13 feet south of the south switch of the cross-over leads off the south-bound track to a creamery siding on the west. The accident occurred at the fouling point of the cross-over with the south-bound track.

Approaching from the north, there is a 1° curve to the right, 400 feet in length, followed by tangent track for a distance of 6,975 feet to Little York station. The grade for south-bound trains is slightly ascending.

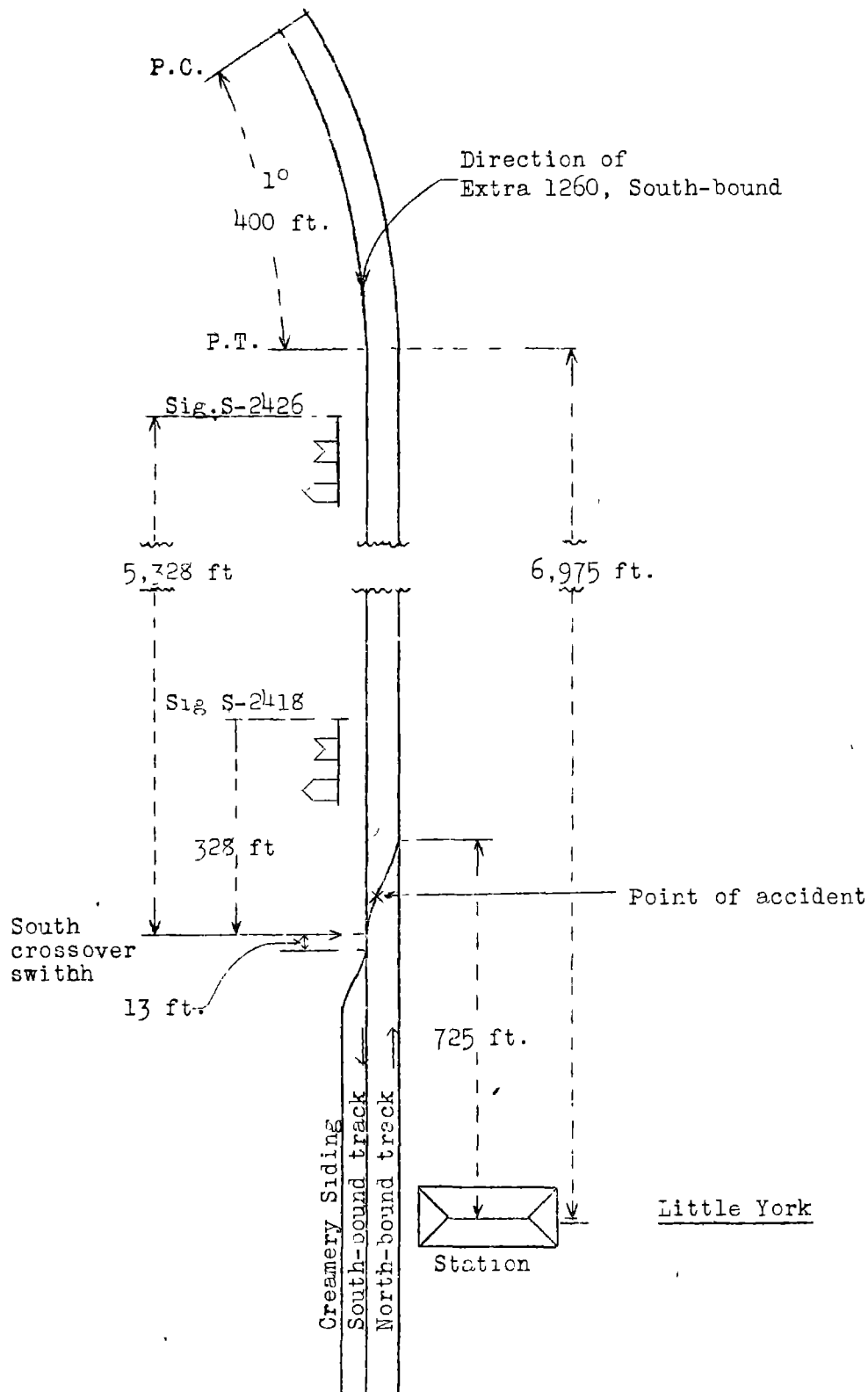
The automatic block signals are of the 2-arm, 2-position, lower quadrant type, lighted by oil-burning lamps, night indications being green, green over yellow, and red over yellow, for proceed, approach, and stop and proceed, respectively. The block signals involved are south-bound signals S-2418 and S-2426, located approximately 328 feet and 5,328 feet respectively, north of the south switch of the cross-over. The maximum permissible speed for 1200 class engines on this division is 40 miles per hour.

A light snow was falling at the time of the accident which occurred about 8:15 p.m.

#### Description

Extra 2133, a north-bound freight train, consisted of 72 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 2133, and was in charge of Conductor Fitzpatrick and Engineman Ford. This train left Binghamton, N. Y., at 3:56 p.m. and stopped at Little York, according to Conductor Fitzpatrick, at about 8:10 p.m. The head car in the train was to be placed in the creamery siding behind

○	Oswego, N.Y.	
		34.98 mi.
○	Syracuse	
		19.47 mi.
○	Apulia	
		2.59 mi.
○	Tully	
		7.44 mi.
X	Point of accident	
○	Little York	
		6.94 mi.
○	Cortland	
		31.94 mi.
○	Chenango Forks	
		11.06 mi.
○	Binghamton, N.Y.	



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a milk car already occupying that track; the engine and head car were crossed over to the south-bound track and the car was left on that track while the engine pulled the milk car out of the creamery siding; the engine had just backed the milk car against the car to be set out when Extra 1260 South was seen to be approaching.

Engine 2133, with the 2 cars, was moving northward through the cross-over, to clear the creamery switch, at a speed of about 6 miles per hour, when it was struck on the left side at the gangway by engine 1260.

Extra 1260, a south-bound freight train, consisted of 24 cars and 2 cabooses, hauled by engine 1260, and was in charge of Conductor George and Engineman Eggleston. This train left Syracuse, N.Y., at 6:45 p.m., passed Tully, the last open office, 7.44 miles north of Little York, at 8:04 p.m., according to the train sheet, and collided with Extra 2133 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 35 and 40 miles per hour.

Engine 2133 was slightly damaged on the left side but was not derailed; the tender was torn from its frame and demolished and stopped at right angles to the track; the cistern was driven back about 5 feet. The milk car was overturned parallel with the cross-over.

Engine 1260 was derailed to the right and stopped in an upright position about 155 feet south of the point of collision. The left side of the engine was badly damaged and the tender was demolished. The first 6 cars of Extra 1260 were derailed and stopped in various positions adjacent to and upon the south-bound track; the south truck of the seventh car was derailed and all of these cars were damaged; the eighth car was slightly damaged but was not derailed. The cross-over was torn out and the south-bound track was damaged for a distance of about 3 rail lengths.

The employees killed were the fireman and the head brakeman of Extra 1260; the engineman of Extra 1260 was fatally injured.

#### Summary of evidence

Engineman Ford, of Extra 2133 North, stated that he had been on this run between 2 and 3 years. At Cortland he received an order requiring his train to wait at Apulia, 10.03 miles north of Little York, for Extra 1260 South and he knew from this order that there was a possibility of his train passing Extra 1260 on double track before reaching Apulia. His own train stopped on the

north-bound main track at Little York at 8:07 p.m. A cut was made behind the first car and the engine and this car were moved northward until they cleared the north switch of the cross-over, during which time Engineman Ford saw Head Brakeman Blow getting his red light ready and he assumed that the brakeman was preparing to furnish flag protection for the cross-over movement. Head Brakeman Blow threw the north switch of the cross-over, then signalled the engineman to back up and disappeared from view on the opposite side of the engine; Engineman Ford then assumed the brakeman went northward to flag south-bound trains and paid no further attention to him. He did not instruct the brakeman to furnish flag protection nor did he give a whistle signal for him to go out; he said that he did not consider it necessary to so instruct a man who had been in the service as long as Brakeman Blow. This brakeman had been working at intervals on this run ever since Engineman Ford had been on the run and the brakeman customarily was prompt in furnishing protection for the cross-over movement. When the engine was standing on the north-bound track waiting for the cross-over switches to be thrown, Fireman Wilson lighted a red fusee and threw it out of the cab window; the fusee landed between the rails of the south-bound track, about 3 or 4 car lengths north of signal S-2418, and remained burning. Engineman Ford also stated that he saw signal S-2418 assume stop position when the south switch of the cross-over was thrown; his engine was then 3 or 4 car lengths north of the signal and he could see the signal indication by the position of the blades as well as the lights which were distinct. After backing through the cross-over, the car attached to the engine was left standing on the main track and the engine backed in upon the creamery siding and picked up a car and coupled it to the car left standing on the main track; when this was completed Engineman Ford saw the headlight of an approaching south-bound train more than a mile away. Not seeing the brakeman out with a flag, he looked back and saw him behind the engine. Engineman Ford blinked his headlight as a warning for the engineman of the approaching train and then dimmed it so the glare would not blind him. The fusee was still burning and he felt sure that the approaching train would stop; he continued ahead through the cross-over toward the north-bound track; his engine had reached the middle of the cross-over and was moving at a speed of about 6 miles per hour when the collision occurred. He estimated that 7 or 8 minutes had elapsed between the time his engine stopped on the north-bound main track waiting for the cross-over switches to be thrown and the time the accident occurred; while the weather was blustery, he had experienced no difficulty in observing signal indications on this trip.

Fireman Wilson, of Extra 2133 North, corroborated the statement of Enginemen Ford regarding the movements at Little York and said that when his engine was standing beyond the north switch of the cross-over waiting for the switches to be thrown he lit a red fusee and threw it into the center of the south-bound track a short distance north of signal S-2418 where it remained burning until after the accident. As his engine was backing through the cross-over he could see that the signal was in stop position. After the car from the creamery siding had been coupled to the car on the main track he locked out and saw the headlight of the south-bound train approaching more than a mile away and he notified his engineman accordingly. At first he thought the train would stop but upon watching the headlight closely he realized that a collision was imminent and he then ran to the right side of the engine to get off and had just gotten hold of the grab iron when the collision occurred. Fireman Wilson was sure the south-bound train had not passed the distant signal before the cross-over switches were thrown, for in that event he said he would have seen the headlight before the cross-over movement was begun. He said it was snowing and blowing but he had been able to see all signal indications en route without difficulty and could have seen a headlight for a mile and a half or two miles.

Head Brakeman Blow, of Extra 2133 North, said that his train held an order to wait at Apulia, 10.3 miles north of Little York, for Extra 1260 South. On previous trips his train had had to wait at Apulia for the south-bound train and he figured the same would have to be done on this trip. When his engine stopped north of the cross-over switch, Fireman Wilson placed a red fusee on the south-bound track. Trainman Blow threw the north switch of the cross-over, as a result of which signal S-2418 was set at stop; the red fusee was burning at this time. He saw the approaching train at least three-fourths of a mile distant and figured it was stopping, but when he saw that it did not stop he gave an emergency stop signal to that train from the right side of the south-bound track. Brakeman Blow said he thoroughly understood the rules and knew that he should have gone out at least 40 car lengths to flag but he depended on the automatic block signals and the red fusee and also considered that the fusee partially relieved him of responsibility. He said the reason he did not go out to flag was because he knew the fireman would throw off a fusee as he had done on previous trips.

Middle Brakeman Carr, of Extra 2133 North, said that both he and Head Brakeman Blow rode the engine from Cortland to Little York but no understanding was had between them as to how the work at that station was to be performed. It was the duty of the head brakeman to furnish flag protection while the middle brakeman did

the switching and Brakeman Carr thought the work would be handled in the same manner on this trip as it had usually been done. He made the cut behind the head car at Little York and dropped off at the south switch of the cross-over and threw it to set the south-bound signal in stop position, then started toward the north cross-over switch when he saw a burning red fusee on the south-bound track and also saw someone with a lantern at the north cross-over switch; he thought this was the fireman and assumed that the head brakeman was out flagging. As his engine was pulling northward through the cross-over he noticed the lights of the south-bound train and thought the train had stopped for the signal and he also saw the fusee, which was still burning, in the vicinity of the south-bound signal. He did not realize the possibility of an accident until he heard the sound of the collision. Brakeman Carr said that while the block signals were not relied upon to protect a cross-over movement that "we like the help of them".

Conductor Fitzpatrick, of Extra 2133 North, stated that when his train stopped at Little York at 8:10 p.m. to spot a car in the creamery siding he was at the rear end; at 8:15 p.m. he heard the roar of escaping steam from the direction of the head end of his train and he immediately started ahead and learned of the accident when he reached the depot. He did not instruct Brakemen Blow and Carr regarding the manner in which the work should be performed, as they were experienced men and each ~~was familiar~~ with his duties. Conductor Fitzpatrick considered Brakeman Blow to be a very capable man and never before knew him to be negligent in the performance of his duties. After the accident Brakeman Blow told him that he did not know why he failed to go out with a flag.

Flagman Rock, of Extra 2133 North, stated that he was protecting the rear of his train while it stood at Little York. The weather was very squally and the wind rose and fell in sudden gusts, carrying the snow along until at times he could not see beyond three car lengths. He could see the lights on an automatic signal about 20 car lengths from where he stood but at times the blowing snow entirely obscured them from his view.

Conductor George, of Extra 1260 South, said he and Engineman Eggleston had talked together prior to leaving Syracuse and Engineman Eggleston appeared to be normal in every respect. The air brakes were tested before leaving Syracuse and were pronounced all right by the car inspector; the gauge in the caboose registered 80 pounds brake pipe pressure. Approaching Little York, he estimated that his train was running at a speed of between 35 and 40 miles per hour when he felt the brakes being applied and the indicator on the air gauge dropped to zero and



the train stopped within a distance of its own length. Conductor George thought the brakes were applied prior to the collision as the train came to a gradual stop. He went forward immediately and saw a red fusee burning under his train on the south-bound track near block signal S-2418, but he did not look at the signal. He said that the visibility was bad and he had not noticed signals at any time en route.

Flagman Denson, of Extra 1260 South, stated that when his train stopped at Little York he went back immediately to flag and he could see the markers of his caboos about one-half mile away.

Middle Brakeman Trick, of Extra 1260 South, talked with Engineman Eggleston prior to leaving Syracuse, and considered him to be normal in all respects. He did not think the brakes on their train were applied prior to the collision, and from the nature of the stop made, he thought that an air hose had burst. On the way to the head end he saw a red fusee burning under the cars of their train just north of the block signal. He paid but scant attention to signals en route and did not observe the indication of the block signal near the point of accident until about 30 minutes after the collision occurred, at which time he saw it was in stop position, with the lights burning. He described the weather as a blinding snow storm.

Dr. C. J. Kelley, who attended Engineman Eggleston of Extra 1260 South, after the collision, made affidavit to the effect that on the morning of December 21st Engineman Eggleston stated that his train was running 40 miles per hour and his first realization of an obstruction was when he was directly upon the other train; that the weather was stormy and he was unable to see signals until he had reached them, that the caution signal was not set against him, and that he saw no fusees and did not explode any torpedoes.

Car Inspector Krelzdok stated that he made a terminal air-brake test on Extra 1260 South, prior to its departure from Syracuse, and that all the brakes applied and released properly.

Machinist Youngs inspected engine 1260 prior to its departure from Syracuse, and found the air equipment on the engine to be in good condition.

Conductor Casey and Engineman Wade, of Extra 1108, which pulled the rear end of Extra 1260 away from the scene of the accident, said the air brakes functioned properly on that portion of the train. Conductor Casey added that he personally inspected every car and every brake of the 17 cars and 2 cabooses, and found nothing wrong.

Signal Engineer Saunders said an inspection of signals was made within a few hours after the occurrence of the accident, and before any changes were made; signal S-2418 was displaying a stop-and-proceed indication and signal S-2426 was displaying an approach indication; the lights on both signals were burning properly.

Assistant Supervisor Goepfert made observations of signals S-2426 and S-2418 at 3:00 a.m. on December 21, and it was noted that the indication of distant signal S-2426 could be seen from the south end of the curve, 1,200 feet north of the signal, and the indication of signal S-2418 in the stop-and-proceed position could also be seen from the same location.

The cross-over between the main tracks, together with switch instruments connected thereto, also similar connections at north end of the creamery siding, were destroyed at the time of the accident. Track shunting tests south of signal S-2418, made after tracks had been restored, showed relay of this signal to be shunting properly.

During the afternoon and evening of December 21, after the south-bound track had been cleared, the signals involved were observed in operation, with trains running in both directions on the south-bound track, and they functioned as intended. The signal cases were then opened for the first time after the accident occurred and tests were made of the operating mechanisms and relays controlling each of the 2 signals and they were found to be operating properly.

#### Discussion

Rule 99 of this railroad is the usual flagging rule and provides that when necessary the front of the train must be protected by the head trainman.

Rule D-152 reads: "When a train crosses over to or obstructs another track, unless otherwise provided, it must first be protected as prescribed by Rule 99 against trains moving with the current of traffic on that track."

Rule 515 states that the function of block signals and the rules governing them do not relieve enginemen, conductors or trainmen from promptly protecting their trains.

Rule 516 reads: "In fog or stormy weather trains must reduce speed if necessary to enable enginemen and trainmen correctly to interpret signal indications."

The evidence indicates that none of these rules was complied with. Extra 2133 North made the cross-over movement to the south-bound track with no protection against south-bound trains other than that afforded by block signal S-2418 and a lighted fusee placed on the south-bound track, both of which were but a short distance north of the cross-over. The weather was very windy and snow was blowing to such an extent that visibility at times was seriously interfered with, and yet the engineman of Extra 1260 South operated his train at approximately the maximum speed authorized. It also appears that the engineman of Extra 1260 did not properly observe and obey the indications of signals S-2426 and S-2418, or the burning fusee, although there is conclusive evidence that his train was considerably north of distant signal S-2426 when the south cross-over switch was thrown, in which event that signal would have displayed an approach indication for that train. Signal S-2418 was seen to be displaying a stop-and-proceed indication immediately preceding and immediately after the accident and a test of both signals involved, made a few hours after the accident and before any alterations had been made, disclosed both signals to be in proper mechanical condition, while the brakes on the undamaged cars in Extra 1260 South were found to be working properly after the accident.

#### Conclusions

This accident was caused by failure of the crew of Extra 2133 North properly to protect a cross-over movement and by further failure of the engineman of Extra 1260 South properly to observe and obey automatic block-signal indications.

Respectfully submitted,

W. J. PATTERSON,

Director.