

## INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY CONCERNING AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE ERIE RAILROAD AT NORTH TONAWANDA, N. Y., ON MARCH 26, 1932.

May 18, 1932.

To the Commission:

On March 26, 1932, there was a head-end collision between two freight trains on the Erie Railroad at North Tonawanda, N. Y., which resulted in the injury of four employees.

#### Location and method of operation

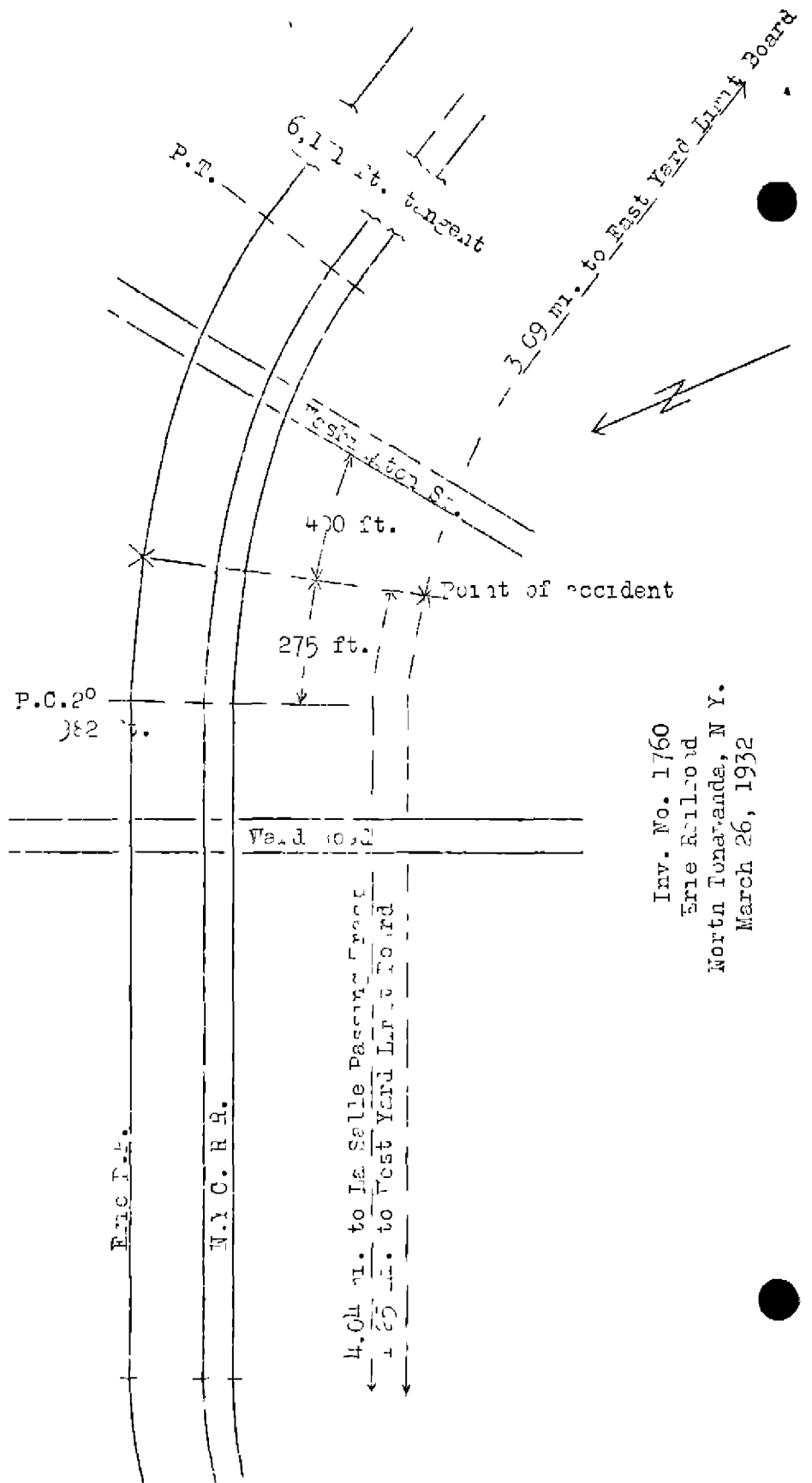
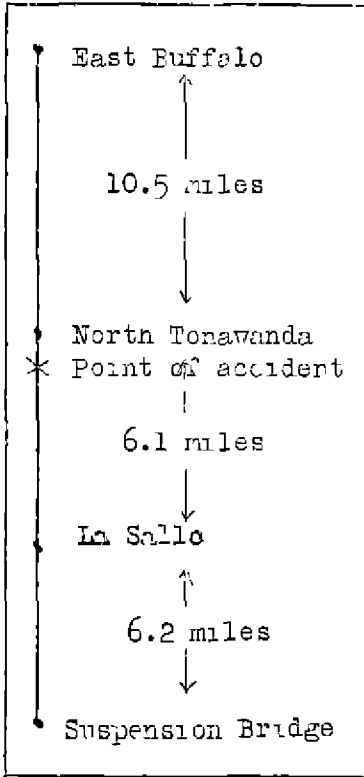
This accident occurred on the Niagara Falls Branch of the Buffalo Division, extending between Suspension Bridge and East Buffalo, N. Y., a distance of 23.9 miles, in the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table, train orders, and a casual block-signal system. The accident occurred within yard limits, at a point 1.25 miles east of the west yard-limit board, approaching this point from the west, the track is tangent for a distance of 1,241 feet, followed by a  $2^{\circ}$  curve to the right 983 feet in length, the accident occurring on this curve at a point about 275 feet from its western end. Approaching from the east the track is tangent for a distance of 6,151 feet, followed by the curve on which the accident occurred. The grade is level.

The tracks of the New York Central Railroad parallel the track of the Erie Railroad on the south in this vicinity, and on account of a line of telegraph poles located between the tracks of these two roads the view across the inside of the curve is considerably obstructed.

There was a heavy rain falling at the time of the accident, which occurred about 8.30 p. m.

#### Description

Eastbound second-class freight train No. 146 consisted of 46 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 2436, and was in charge of Conductor Manning and Engineer King. At Suspension Bridge, the initial terminal, the conductor received among others a copy of train order No. 17, Form 19, together with a clearance card, Form A, the train order provided in part for a meet with train No. 187 at LaSalle, which is 7.2 miles east of Suspension Bridge and is a closed office.



Inv. No. 1760  
 Erie Railroad  
 North Tonawanda, N.Y.  
 March 26, 1932

Conductor Manning did not deliver a copy of this order to Engineman King, and train No. 146 left Suspension Bridge at 6.10 p. m., according to the train sheet, 4 hours and 55 minutes late, with the engine crew unaware of the meet order, passed LaSalle and collided with train No. 187 within the yard limits of North Tonawanda while traveling at a speed variously estimated to have been between 5 and 15 miles per hour.

Westbound second-class train No. 187 consisted of 29 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 2437, and was in charge of Conductor Lavery and Engineman Oswick. On passing North Tonawanda, the last open office, 1.99 miles east of the point of accident, at 6.35 p. m., according to the train sheet, 55 minutes late, the crew received copy of train order No. 17, Form 19, previously referred to, together with clearance cards Form A and also Form B, and collided with train No. 146 shortly afterwards while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 6 and 8 miles per hour.

Both engines were derailed and considerably damaged, but remained upright, the first two cars in train No. 146 were derailed, while the first car in train No. 187 telescoped the tender of engine 2437. The employees injured were the fireman, conductor and two brakemen of train No. 187.

#### Summary of evidence

Conductor Manning, of train No. 146, stated that at about 5.50 p. m. he delivered to the engineman three train orders not involved in the accident, together with clearance cards, Form A and Form B, and also a message. At 6 p. m. Conductor Manning was in the office waiting for his bills and while there Operator Clark received train order No. 17, establishing the meet at LaSalle, this order was made complete at 6.03 p. m. and Operator Clark delivered it to Conductor Manning, together with another clearance card, Form A, listing the numbers of all four train orders received at that point. Conductor Manning said he told Operator Clark he could not get a copy of the order to Engineman King, as it was too late and the train was about ready to depart, but nevertheless the conductor accepted the order and clearance card and went out to his caboose. Later on he came back to the office, and he said he then asked Operator Clark whether train No. 187 was coming to LaSalle, and understood the operator to say "No, it was too late." Conductor Manning stated that he had to run to catch the caboose, and that his train departed at 6.10 p. m., without a copy of train order No. 17 having been delivered to the engineman. The speed of his train was about 25 miles per hour approaching the yard limits at North Tonawanda, and he said he felt the air brakes apply

immediately prior to the accident. In further explanation Conductor Manning stated that it had been customary to get all the train orders while the engineman was also in the office with him, and that never before had he had occasion to receive an additional order from the operator to be delivered to the engine or after the engineman was on the engine. In this particular case he thought that possibly the operator misunderstood his question about whether train No. 187 was coming to LaSalle, at which time he claimed that the operator replied "No, it was too late", and although he had not received any order which would annul or supersede train order No. 17, yet he assumed that it had been annulled, the reason he did not deliver a copy of the order to the engineman thus being based on the misinterpretation he had placed on the reply given him by Operator Clark.

Flagman Lloyd and Brakeman Gibbons, both of whom were promoted men, stated that they read train order No. 17 shortly after departing from Suspension Bridge, but that Conductor Manning told them it had been cancelled and they took the conductor's word for it and dismissed it from their minds without asking to see an annullment order, neither did they inquire as to whether copy of the order had been delivered to the engineman. They were riding in the caboose approaching North Tonawanda and their estimates as to the speed at the time the air brakes were applied ranged from 18 to 25 miles per hour, there was a light application on entering the yard limits and the second application came just prior to the accident, the brakeman estimating that the speed was reduced to about 8 miles per hour when the accident occurred.

Engineman King, of train No. 146, stated that he was entirely unaware of the meet at LaSalle with train No. 137, which was inferior by direction, and on reaching the west end of "WX" siding at North Tonawanda, just inside of the west yard-limit board, he shut off steam and shortly thereafter made an air-brake application, reducing to a speed of not more than 15 miles per hour, then he released the brakes and permitted the train to drift. As his engine approached the point of accident he looked across the inside of the curve and saw steam exhausting from an engine, but thought that it was from an engine on the tracks of the New York Central Railroad, not definitely ascertaining that it was on his own road until it was from five to seven car-lengths distant. The speed of his own train was 14 or 15 miles per hour and he at once applied the air brakes in emergency and sounded the whistle, he estimated that the speed of his train had been reduced to from 5 to 8 miles per hour by the time the accident occurred. The headlight on his engine was burning and the air brakes worked properly. Engineman King further stated that he was operating his train within yard limits so as to be able to stop within his range of vision, but not in time to avoid striking a

train moving in the opposite direction. The statements of Fireman Beimler and Brakeman Chunce brought out nothing additional of importance

Engineman Oswick, of train No. 187, stated that on passing the office at North Tonawanda the speed of his train was reduced to about 10 or 12 miles per hour and train order No. 17, establishing the meet with train No. 146 at LaSalle, was handed on, following which he increased the speed to about 15 or 20 miles per hour. Engineman Oswick was on the outside of the curve and was unaware of anything wrong until Brakeman Graef, who was riding on the left side of the engine, shouted a warning of danger. At first the engineman thought this was to warn him of something on the highway grade crossing at Washington Street, 400 feet east of the point of accident, so all he did was to start sounding the whistle, but the brakeman called a second warning, to the effect that a train was approaching, and the engineman immediately applied the air brakes in emergency, about at Washington Street, closed the throttle and jumped, it was his estimate that he reduced the speed of his train from 15 or 20 miles per hour to about 6 or 8 miles per hour as a result of the emergency application. Engineman Oswick was familiar with the yard-limit rule, requiring him to move prepared to stop unless the main track was seen or known to be clear, and was of the opinion that he could have brought his train to a stop in time to have avoided striking a standing obstruction, but not a train moving in the opposite direction. He further stated that the headlight on his engine was burning dimly, as it was not real dark at the time of the accident, and that the air brakes worked properly.

The statements of Brakeman Graef were to the effect that it was not until the opposing train was about 14 or 15 car-lengths distant that he definitely ascertained that it was on the track of his own railroad, whereupon he told the engineman to "Put her in the big hole, we are going into 146, unload " The engineman misunderstood and thought he said there was something on the highway crossing, so Brakeman Graef again told him he was going to collide with another train. Fireman Rausch was putting in a fire when the brakeman called the first warning of danger, while Conductor Lavery, Brakeman Horn and Flagman Brundage were riding in the caboose at the time of the accident.

Train Dispatcher Walsh stated that at 6 p. m. he telephoned Operator Clark as to the time train No. 146 would be ready to depart and the operator informed him about 6.10 p. m., whereupon, the dispatcher issued train order No. 17, establishing the meet with train No. 187 at LaSalle. After the order was made complete, at 6.03 p. m., the operator informed the dispatcher that Conductor Manning protested the order as it would be necessary to proceed

to the engine in order to deliver it to the engineman, with the train then ready to depart, but the dispatcher told the operator that the order would stand, following which the operator told the dispatcher that the conductor had accepted the order and clearance card and had left the office.

Operator Clark, on duty at Suspension Bridge, stated that he delivered train order No. 17 to Conductor Manning and that after reading the order the conductor protested it, so the operator telephoned the dispatcher, but the dispatcher said that the order would remain in effect. When the operator turned around to inform the conductor accordingly, however, the conductor had left the office, taking the order and clearance card with him. Just before train No. 146 departed, the conductor came back, looked in at the door, without coming into the office, and asked whether the order stood, to which the operator replied that it did, the train then started and the conductor had to run to catch the caboose. No question was raised between them as to whether the order had been annulled.

#### Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of Conductor Manning, of train No. 143, to deliver a meet order to his engineman.

Conductor Manning had received his orders and clearance cards at the telegraph office and delivered them to the engineman, who returned to his engine. Subsequently another order was received providing for a meeting with train No. 187 at LaSalle, Conductor Manning protested this order and then accepted it and returned to his train, just before starting, however, he went back to the office and said he asked the operator if train No. 187 was coming to LaSalle and that he receive a negative reply. Apparently Conductor Manning then got the idea in his head that the order had been annulled, although no mention was made of an annulment order, and he returned to his train and allowed it to proceed without making any attempt to send a copy of the meet order to the engineman. The result, of course, was that the train passed the meeting point without stopping and it was not until it reached North Tonawanda and train No. 187 was seen approaching that the engineman realized there was anything wrong, too late, however, to avert the accident.

The view in the vicinity of the point of accident was restricted but the enginemen of the two trains said they were operating in compliance with the rule which requires all except first-class trains to move within yard limits prepared to stop unless the main track is seen or known to

be clear, and it was their opinion that they could have stopped short of an obstruction, but not in the case of a train moving toward them. There was no evidence to prove that either train was being operated at an excessive rate of speed, or that either engineer would have been unable to stop short of a standing train.

All of the employees involved were experienced men, and at the time of the accident none of them had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. SORLAND

Director