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NO. 1851-1900 U. S. INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

Railroad accident investigation report
E.V. 387 NO. 1851-1900

1851

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY CONCERNING AN ACCIDENT ON THE ERIE RAILROAD NEAR WESTCOLANG, PA., ON SEPTEMBER 1, 1933.

Dept. of Transportation

JUL 10 1976

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December 22, 1933.

To the Commission:

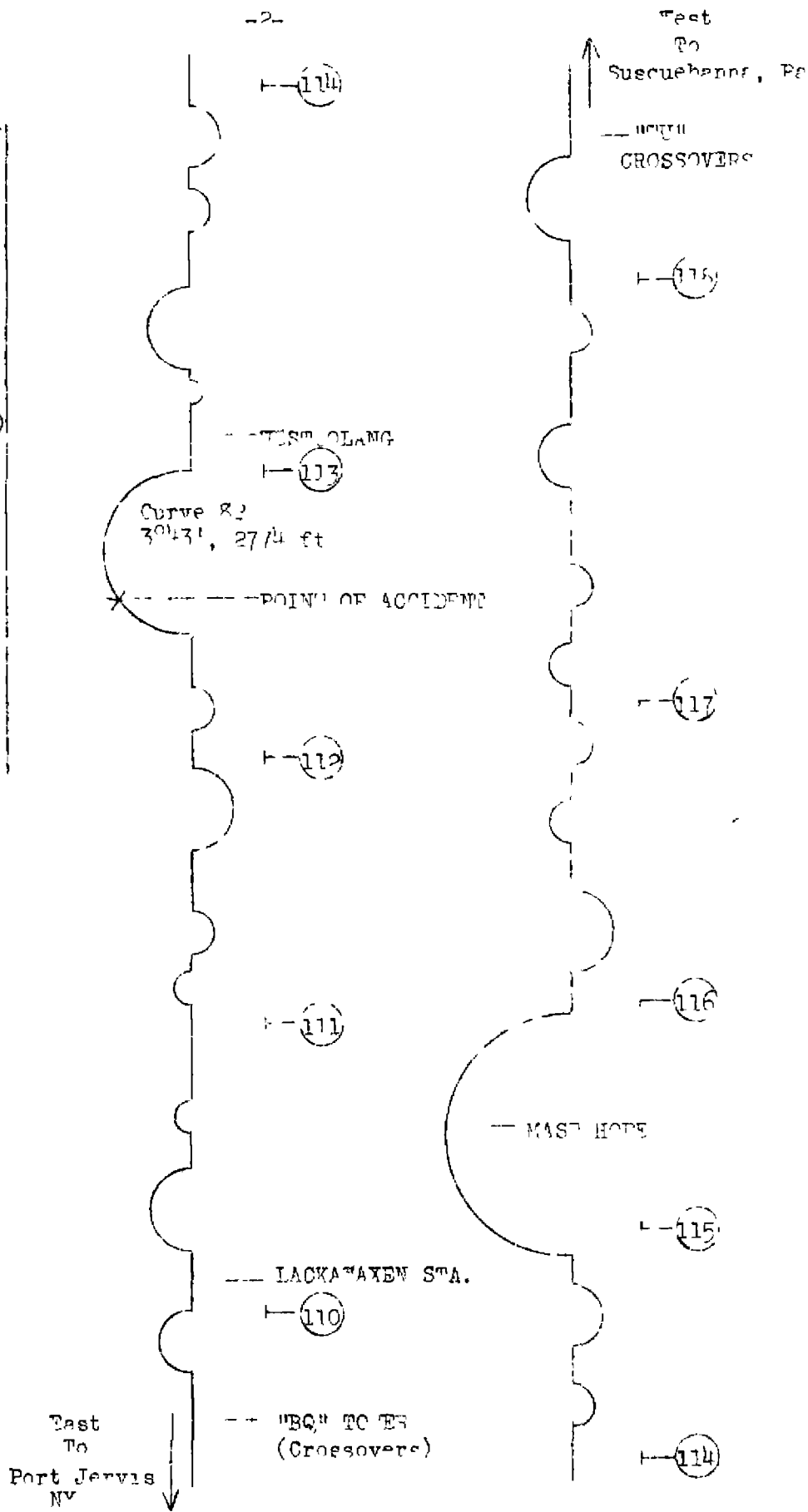
On September 1, 1933, there was a head-end collision between two gasoline section motor cars on the Erie Railroad near Westcolang, Pa., which resulted in the death of 2 employees and the injury of 5 employees.

Location and method of operation.

This accident occurred on the Delaware Division, extending between Susquehanna, Pa., and Fort Jervis, N. Y., a distance of 104.4 miles; in the vicinity of the point of accident this is a double-track line over which trains are operated by time table, train orders, and an automatic block-signal system, supplemented by an automatic train stop of the intermittent-induction type. That part of the division extending between BQ tower, located 1 mile east of Lackawaxen, and TU cross-overs, located 0.72 mile west of Tusten, a total distance of about 9.2 miles is known as the "loop" and is equipped with centralized traffic control; within this territory trains and engines may proceed on signal indications in either direction on either track with ut regard to train or time-table rights of opposing or following trains. At each end of the loop there are flying-point and trailing-point cross-overs connecting the two main tracks, movements through which are governed by interlocking signal indications, controlled by the operator in BQ tower under instructions from the dispatcher. There is a telephone booth opposite the TU cross-overs. All motor cars entering the loop at either BQ tower or TU cross-overs or at intermediate points must obtain permission from the operator at BQ tower, who maintains a record of all motor cars operating within the loop. Line-ups for the operation of motor cars are given by the operator at BQ tower, preferably in writing on forms provided for this purpose. Motor cars operating within the loop are required to protect themselves against all trains except when moving against the current of traffic: in such cases permission must be secured to make such movement from the operator at BQ tower. Paragraph "H", rule 765, of the safety rules, under the heading "Rule Governing the Use of Motor, Hand, Push and Velocipede Cars," reads in part as follows:

"Employees in charge of such cars must obtain a train line-up (preferably in writing), originated by the Train Dispatcher, giving all the train and motor cars operating in a specified section during a certain period ***."

o	Port Jervis, N.Y.	2.6 mi.
o	Sparrowbush, N.Y.	19.3 mi.
o	BQ Tower	1.0 mi.
o	Lackawaxen, Pa.	3.0 mi.
x	Westcolang, (D of A)	2.3 mi.
o	Mast Hope, Pa.	2.18 mi.
o	Tuster, N.Y.	0.72 mi.
o	"TJ" Crossovers	
		73.3 mi.
o	Susquehanna, Pa.	



Inv. No. 1851
 Erie Railroad
 Westcolang, Pa
 Sept. 1, 1933

East
 To
 Port Jervis
 NY

The accident occurred within the loop on the west-bound track, at a point about 0.45 mile east of Westcolang, which station is located 5.5 miles east of Tusten. Approaching the point of accident from either direction, there is a series of curves and tangents; the curves on this division are numbered from east to west and the accident occurred on curve 82, at a point 800 feet from its eastern end, this being a $3^{\circ} 43'$ curve to the right for west-bound trains 2,774 feet in length. The grade at the point of accident is 0.21 percent ascending for west-bound trains.

On account of trees and shrubbery, as well as a pole line on the inside of the curve, neither crew could see the opposing motor car until they were within 546 feet of each other.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 4:30 p.m.

Description

East-bound section motor car 132, hauling two trailers with 49 trackmen aboard, was in charge of Extra Gang Foreman Hughes. This car left TU tower at 4:08 p.m., running ahead of train No. 2 on the east-bound main track. At Mast Hope, 2.3 miles west of Westcolang, Foreman Hughes decided that he could not keep ahead of train No. 2 to Lackawaxen, so he stopped and telephoned Operator Maillat, at BQ tower, and stated that the operator gave him permission to proceed against the current of traffic on the west-bound track. The motor car and trailers were then shifted over to that track and started eastward about 4:20 p.m., passed Westcolang, and had reduced speed from 15 or 18 miles per hour almost to a stop before they collided with motor car 159.

West-bound section motor car 159 was in charge of Signaller Dwyer, accompanied by Signal Helper Vernold. At Lackawaxen, 3 miles east of Westcolang, the signaller telephoned Operator Maillat, about 4:20 p.m., and obtained permission to proceed westward on the west-bound track. Motor car 159 departed from Lackawaxen and was approaching Westcolang when it collided with motor car 132 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 5 and 10 miles per hour. None of the equipment was derailed, and the motor cars were only slightly damaged. The employees killed were the signaller who was operating motor car 159, and a trackman who was on motor car 132; the employees injured were five trackmen riding on the trailers.

Summary of evidence

Extra Gang Foreman Hughes, of motor car 132, stated that it was 4:18 p.m. when he stopped at Mast Hope and telephoned to Operator Maillat, asking for a line-up on the west-bound track, and he said he was told that there was a freight train pulling out west-bound from Sparrowbush, located 20.3 miles east of Lackawaxen, but that it was all right for him to come east with the motor car from Mast Hope to Lackawaxen, a distance of 5.3

miles, on the west-bound track; Foreman Hughes said he repeated to the operator that he would use the west-bound track, also asking the operator whether there were any west-bound motor cars in the loop and being told there was none. Motor car 132 and the trailers were then set over upon the west-bound track and proceeded eastward on that track at about 4:20 p.m., moving at a speed of 12 or 15 miles per hour. The first knowledge the foreman had of anything wrong was while rounding curve 82, when he saw motor car 159 about 300 feet away; the speed of his own motor car and trailers was about 10 or 12 miles per hour, and he immediately threw the motor out of gear, applied the brakes, and shouted a warning of danger to the trackmen on the trailers, the collision occurring immediately afterwards. Just after the accident Foreman Hughes put up his portable telephone and called Operator Maillat, saying "I thought you told me no cars in loop, and I had permission from you" and the operator replied "there were no motor cars at that time." Foreman Hughes felt he had exercised proper caution in the operation of his motor car and trailers in view of the verbal permission he had received from the operator, even though he had not filled out the usual line-up form provided for the movement of motor cars, saying that he had run out of blanks, and as there was only one west-bound train coming he did not think it necessary to have a written record of the line-up.

Assistant Foreman Brown and Kuhn, as well as Station Agent Davis, were standing near Foreman Hughes at Mast Hope when he requested permission to come east on the west-bound track, and all of them said they heard Foreman Hughes ask permission to make the movement in question, and say to the operator "O. K. I will come the west-bound track to Lackawaxen".

Signal Helper Vernold, on motor car 159, stated that Signalman Dwyer went into the station at Lackawaxen to telephone the operator at BQ tower and secure a line-up in order to proceed westward through the loop; the signal helper stayed at the motor car and the signalman came out about 4:20 p.m. and told the helper it was all right to proceed, whereupon the motor car was placed upon the west-bound track and departed. A speed of about 20 miles per hour was attained, with the signalman maintaining a lookout ahead while the helper maintained a lookout toward the rear, occasionally glancing ahead, and it was when he looked ahead on entering curve 82 that he saw the opposing motor car, about 200 feet away. He immediately shouted a warning of danger and the signalman applied the brakes with such force that the wheels locked and slid; realizing that a collision was imminent, the helper jumped when the motor cars were about 20 feet apart, at which time the speed of his own motor car was between 5 and 10 miles per hour.

Operator Maillat, at BQ tower, stated that when Foreman Hughes telephoned from Mast Hope and asked what the prospects were of coming east on the west-bound track, he replied that they were very poor. The foreman then asked what trains were coming west-bound and the operator told him that a freight train

had just left Sparrowcush; the foreman then wanted to know if any motor cars were coming and the operator told him there was none; the foreman then said that he was going and the operator figured that he was going to continue east on the east-bound track. Afterwards Signalmen Dwyer, with motor car 159, telephoned from Lackawaxen and asked for and was given a west-bound line-up. Operator Maillat did not tell him anything about Foreman Hughes as the operator thought Hughes was on the east-bound track. Operator Maillat afterwards stated that when Foreman Hughes called from Mast Hope he said that he was coming east on the west-bound track to Lackawaxen, to which statement Operator Maillat made no reply or acknowledgment of any kind, apparently leaving it to Foreman Hughes to act upon his own responsibility and protect himself. When Signalmen Dwyer called, however, Operator Maillat said he was under the impression that Foreman Hughes was still on the east-bound track. Operator Maillat understood he could not authorize motor cars to operate between BQ Tower and Tusten, either with or against the current of traffic, without permission from the dispatcher but he said he had authorized such movements in the past without the dispatcher or any one else knowing about it, and without any one being able to detect the practice by an examination of his block sheet. Motor car 132 was a Fairbanks Morse type 40-B 12-horsepower car, with a total weight of 1,360 pounds, equipped with a foot lever brake and friction brake blocks on all four wheels, and having a seating capacity of 10 men. Both trailers were equipped with a hand lever brake and friction brake shoes on all four wheels; the seating capacity of each trailer was 20 men. Motor car 159 was a Fairbanks Morse type 41 5-horsepower car, weighing 650 pounds, and equipped with an external-contracting brake band with drum on the rear axle, operated by a hand lever; it had a seating capacity of 4 men. Both motor cars were insulated, so that they had no effect upon the operation of automatic signals.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of Operator Maillat, at BQ tower, to conform with the rules governing operation of motor cars in centralized traffic control territory and to have a definite understanding with Extra Gang Foreman Hughes as to the intended movement of section motor car 132 eastward from Mast Hope to Lackawaxen.

The statements of Operator Maillat were somewhat confused but apparently he heard Foreman Hughes say on the telephone that he wanted to move eastward on the west-bound track from Mast Hope to Lackawaxen; while he stated that he did not authorize this movement it is apparent that he did not give the foreman definite and unmistakable information and instructions. When Signalmen Dwyer called Operator Maillat and wanted to move westward on the west-bound track, the operator authorized him to do so as he was under the erroneous impression that Foreman Hughes was still on the east-bound track. Not only did Operator Maillat fail to have any definite understanding with Foreman Hughes as to the

movement the latter was making, but he failed to comply with that part of the provisions of paragraph h, rule 765, of the safety rules, previously quoted, wherein employees in charge of motor cars are required to have a line-up originated by the dispatcher. Forms are provided on which line-ups are supposed to be written and on the bottom of the form is the notation "operator copying this line-up must repeat same back to the train dispatcher". Notwithstanding the plain intent of the rules, the record indicates that the dispatcher had no knowledge of what was being done.

Foreman Hughes understood he was authorized verbally by the operator to move against the current of traffic on the west-bound track and he thought the operator was fully aware of the fact that he was proceeding on that understanding. Here again the provisions of paragraph h, rule 765, were ignored, and Foreman Hughes also ignored the first paragraph of rule 765 which requires that "permission must be obtained from the train dispatcher when circumstances demand operation against traffic". It further appeared that Foreman Hughes did not have with him a supply of the forms supposed to be used when line-ups are issued.

According to his statements, Operator Maillat had authorized various movements of motor cars in the past either with or against the current of traffic without the dispatcher being aware of what was being done, and handled them in such a way as to make it difficult to ascertain by subsequent check of his records that he was not conforming with the requirements of the rules. These motor cars are insulated so that they have no effect on the automatic signals and are of such light weight that they could not be depended upon to shunt track circuits even if not insulated. They are therefore deprived of the benefits to be obtained from automatic signal protection; the centralized traffic control system provided means for furnishing adequate protection for movements of this character, but in this territory where train movements may be made on either track in either direction at the will of the train dispatcher, it is absolutely necessary that the rules and practices laid down for the movement of motor cars be rigidly observed and obeyed. Verbal permission to operate under such circumstances, capable of misunderstanding as in this case, violates all principles of safe operation and is in no way authorized by the rules in effect; the responsibility rests upon operating officials to take such steps as may be necessary to compel observance of rules on the part of operators and also employees in charge of motor cars.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director.