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Inv-2111

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

WASHINGTON

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR

BUREAU OF SAFETY

ACCIDENT ON THE

LOUISIANA & ARKANSAS RAILWAY

GRANT, LA.

NOVEMBER 9, 1936

INVESTIGATION NO. 2111

SUMMARY

Inv-2111

Railroad: Louisiana & Arkansas
Date: November 9, 1936
Location: Grant, La.
Kind of accident: Head-end collision
Trains involved: Freight : Freight
Train numbers: 51 : Extra 509 North
Engine numbers: 551 : 509
Consist: 25 cars and caboose : 10 cars and caboose
Speed: 20-25 m.p.h. : 8-15 m.p.h.
Track: 2° curve; approximately level
Weather: Clear
Time: 8:45 a.m.
Casualties: 4 killed and 6 injured
Cause: Failure to obey a wait order

January 13, 1937.

To the Commission:

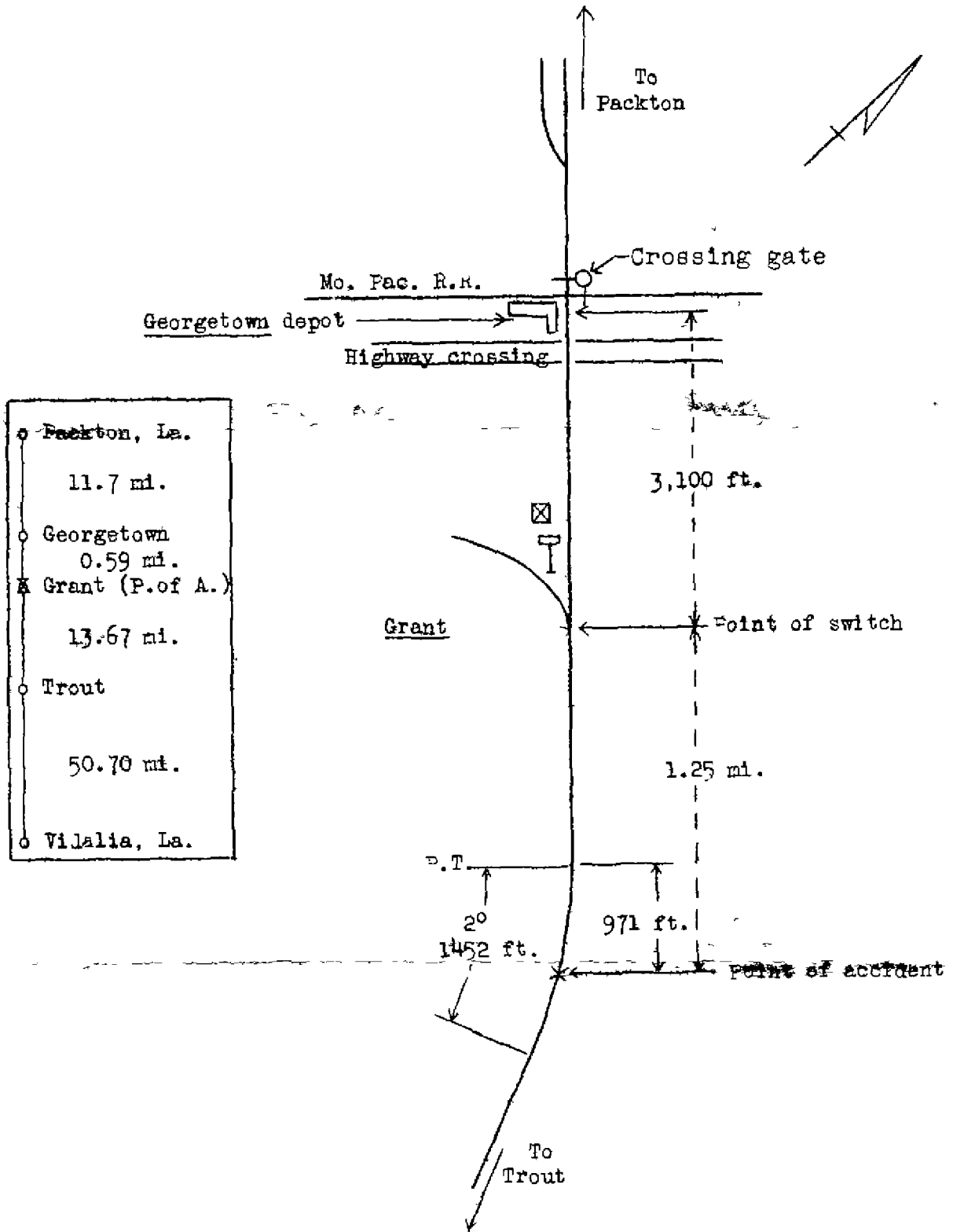
On November 9, 1936, there was a head-end collision between two freight trains on the Louisiana & Arkansas Railway near Grant, La., which resulted in the death of 4 employees and the injury of 6 employees.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Vidalia District, which extends between Packton and Vidalia, La., a distance of 76.74 miles; in the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by timetable and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. The accident occurred at a point approximately 1.25 miles south of a switch at Grant; approaching this point from the north, the track is tangent for more than 3 miles followed by a 2° curve to the right 1,452 feet in length, and then tangent for nearly 2 miles beyond, the accident occurring on the curve, 971 feet from its northern end. The grade is practically level for 3,000 feet each side of the point of accident, which is located on a fill about 2 feet in height and 500 feet in length. Owing to the curvature and to trees along the right of way, the view ahead from the cabs of approaching engines is restricted to about 1,250 feet.

Grant is not a station but is listed with 65 similar locations and shown by districts under special instructions in the back of the timetable, as "Business Tracks Not Shown As Stations On Time Table". There is a freight shelter at this point bearing on the side facing the track a sign reading GRANT; a similar sign, painted on both sides in 8-inch black letters on a white background, is located on a 6-foot post about 60 feet south of the shed, and on the west side of the main track. This sign is plainly visible from the cab of engines approaching from either direction. A spur track, connecting with the track of the Grant Lumber Company, leads off the main track to the west at a point about 350 feet south of the latter sign and is a facing-point switch for north-bound trains. This switch is located approximately 3,100 feet south of the station at Georgetown and for a number of years has been used by meeting and passing trains.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 8:45 a.m.



o	Packton, La.
	11.7 mi.
o	Georgetown
	0.59 mi.
x	Grant (P. of A.)
	13.67 mi.
o	Trout
	50.70 mi.
o	Vidalia, La.

Inv. No. 2111
 Louisiana & Arkansas Ry.
 Grant, La.
 Nov. 9, 1936

Description

Train No. 51, a south-bound freight train, consisted of 25 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 551, and was in charge of Conductor Hughes and Engineman Hunter. This train left Packton, the last open office north of Georgetown, at 8:05 a.m., according to the train sheet, and arrived at Georgetown at 8:25 a.m. where a car was set off; the train left Georgetown at 8:40 a.m., according to the statements of several witnesses, and as it was departing, the operator handed the conductor two copies of train order 38, form 19, reading: "Eng 509 run extra Trout to Georgetown No. 51 Eng 551 wait at Grant until 9:01 a.m. for Extra 509 North", and also two copies of train order 39, changing a meeting point between Train No. 51 and Train No. 52; order 38, however, was not complied with and Train No. 51 continued beyond Grant without stopping and collided with Extra 509 North at a point approximately 1.25 miles south of Grant, while traveling at an estimated speed of between 20 and 25 miles per hour.

Extra 509, a north-bound extra freight train, consisted of 10 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 509, and was in charge of Conductor Alsup and Engineman Edwards. At Trout, located 14.3 miles south of Georgetown, this train received a copy of train order 38, above quoted, and departed from that station at 8:20 a.m., according to the train sheet, and collided with Train No. 51 while running at an estimated speed of between 8 and 15 miles per hour.

Both engines were derailed but remained upright with drivers close to the rails; the front ends were caved in, frames broken and pilot beams torn off, and both tenders were driven forward against the boiler heads. The first car in Train No. 51 was derailed and slightly damaged; the front end of the second car stopped on the roadbed behind the first car, the rear end was about 6 feet east of the center line of track and the body was tilted to the east at an angle of about 45 degrees; the third, fourth and fifth cars were totally destroyed and piled in a space of about one car-length; the sixth car stopped on its side east of the track, at an angle of about 45 degrees to the track, and the front end of the seventh car was derailed, upright, to the west; none of the other equipment in this train was derailed or damaged. The first car in Extra 509 was telescoped by the tank of the engine and was derailed but remained upright and in line with the track; the second car was demolished and thrown to the east of the track; the third car was derailed but remained upright, against and directly behind the first car, and the fourth car stopped on its side east of the track at an angle of about 30 degrees to the track. No other cars in this train were derailed or damaged.

The employees killed were the engineman of Train No. 51 and the fireman, head brakeman and a train guard of Extra 509; those injured were the fireman and head brakeman of Train No. 51 and the conductor, engineman, middle brakeman and rear brakeman of Extra 509.

Summary of evidence

Conductor Hughes of Train No. 51 stated that he entered the service of the Louisiana & Arkansas Railway on October 17, 1936, and made ~~one trip over the Vidalia District to learn the road~~ before taking charge of a train as conductor on that district; the trip on which the accident occurred was his third trip running on the Vidalia District, each of which was made with Engineman Hunter whom he considered a competent man. Conductor Hughes was examined on the operating rules of the Louisiana & Arkansas Railway and he considered himself qualified to take charge of a train on that line without a pilot. Before leaving on the trip involved he had compared his watch with a standard clock at Shreveport and also with the time of his engineman, and his watch did not vary more than 7 seconds with either. The air brakes on his train were tested by carmen at Minden, who reported them to be operating properly and the brakes had worked properly en route. Conductor Hughes rode on the engine from Packton to Georgetown and during that time he advised his engineman that there was a passenger in the caboose for Georgetown. His train arrived at Georgetown at 8:30 a.m. and one car was set out a few hundred feet north of the depot, after which he walked ahead of the engine and opened the gate at the Missouri Pacific grade crossing at the north end of the station platform. The train order signal was displaying a stop indication for his train and when he reached the station platform he was met by the operator. ~~He asked the operator what he had for him, to which the operator~~ replied: "Here's your orders", and handed him two sets of folded orders and clearance cards without further comment. The engine had reached the station by this time and Conductor Hughes handed the engineman's set of orders to the head brakeman who took them and disappeared from view in the gangway. Conductor Hughes then ran ahead of his engine to flag a highway crossing at the south end of the station platform and remained at that point, passing signals to the engineman for the purpose of spotting the caboose at the station to land the passenger; he entered the caboose when it reached him and read aloud to the rear brakeman the two train orders which he had received. Upon learning that Order No. 38 required his train to wait at Grant until 9:01 a.m. for Extra 509 North, he searched the timetable in an endeavor

to locate that station and being unable to find it on the schedule he examined the back of the timetable, and located Grant as a business track at Mile Post A-169.92. Knowing that Georgetown was shown on the timetable as being located at Mile Post 169.34 he immediately realized that Grant was very close and he stepped to the rear platform of the caboose to see if he could see the opposing train or the switch at Grant, and when he was unable to do so, he reached for the emergency valve to apply the air but the collision occurred before this was accomplished. Conductor Hughes said that during the six times he had passed this vicinity, he had not noticed the sign post identifying Grant and that previously he had never received orders which took effect at a business track nor had he ever been given any instructions that it was customary to issue such orders on this railroad. During his trips learning various portions of the road, he had given his chief attention to the location of stations shown on the schedules and to the location of derails and the capacity of sidetracks. He said that he never had expected to be given a restricting order taking effect so short a distance beyond the point at which the order was received without having his attention called particularly to that fact and that if his train had been stopped for the delivery of the order or if he had received the order in the telegraph office, the accident would not have occurred as he would then have read the order when it was given to him and would have assured himself of the location of Grant. He said that his train left Georgetown at 8:41 a.m. and had attained a speed of between 20 and 25 miles per hour at the time the emergency application of the brakes was made and he thought the speed had been reduced to about 15 miles per hour at the time of collision, at 8:45 a.m. .

Rear Brakeman Hobson of Train No. 51 stated that he entered the service of the Louisiana & Arkansas Railway on October 18, 1936; he had made 7 or 8 trips over the Vidalia District and was familiar with the location of Grant. This was his third trip with Conductor Hughes who had previously always shown him any orders that he had received; however on this trip he failed to do this with respect to orders received at Georgetown and Brakeman Hobson was unaware that any orders had been picked up at that point. After seeing the passenger safely alight at the station, Brakeman Hobson entered the caboose as the train was departing, at 8:40 a.m.; he went to the forward end and put coal in the stove and while he was doing this, Conductor Hughes was talking to the train guard and a deadhead fireman near the desk but Brakeman Hobson did not overhear any of the conversation, neither did he see any train orders. The first intimation he had of impending danger was when he felt an emergency application of the air brakes, quickly followed by the collision. He said that had he been shown the orders at Georgetown he would have applied the brakes

from the emergency valve before the train had passed Grant, as he was familiar with that location.

Head Brakeman Newsome of Train No. 51 stated that he entered the service of the Louisiana & Arkansas Railway on September 24, 1936, and had been employed in switching service and as a brakeman in train service since that date. The trip involved was the first he had ever made over the Vidalia District, either in service or for the purpose of learning the road. He compared his time with that of the engineman before commencing the trip and there was a variation of but a few seconds between their watches. The air brakes were tested, and had worked properly en route, and no difficulty had been experienced in making any of the stops; a car was set out at Georgetown after which the train pulled down to the Missouri Pacific Railroad grade crossing; he was in the gangway of the engine and Conductor Hughes handed him some folded train orders and a clearance card, which were immediately passed to the engineman but Brakeman Newsome did not know how many orders were received. The train was then moved ahead and stopped for the purpose of landing a passenger from the caboose at the depot, and it was then that the engineman read the orders; Engineman Hunter read one order aloud which changed a meeting point between his train and Train No. 52; this was the only order that Brakeman Newsome heard read, or that he knew anything about, and he further stated that even had he known their train was to wait at Grant, he did not know where that point was located and if he had been required to locate it in the timetable, his train would have passed Grant before he could have located the place. His train left Georgetown at 8:40 a.m. and the first knowledge he had that an accident was imminent was when Engineman Hunter shouted a warning to jump; his train was running at a speed of about 20 miles per hour; the engineman applied the air brakes and all parties on the engine jumped just before the collision occurred at 8:45 a.m.

Fireman O'Brien of Train No. 51 stated that he entered the service of the Louisiana & Arkansas Railway September 25, 1936. He was familiar with the Vidalia District and had made 8 or 10 trips with Engineman Hunter. The air brakes were tested at Minden and reported all right by a car inspector and there had been no difficulty in stopping the train at any point. At Georgetown Conductor Hughes handed the engineman some train orders with the remark to "high ball" until the train cleared the Missouri Pacific crossing and then to stop until the crossing gate was restored to normal position. Fireman O'Brien was working on the deck, as it was a hard pull out of Georgetown, and after the train finally started to leave that station the engineman began to read his orders. The fireman asked him what they were; the

engineman replied "we have a meet with No. 52 at Trout instead of Jena," and he then placed the orders in his pocket, making no mention of having received any other orders, and Fireman O'Brien did not know that he had received others, although he had intended to ask to see them later. His first knowledge of anything wrong was when the engineman shouted a warning, applied the brakes in emergency and reversed the engine, at which time the train was traveling at a speed of between 15 and 22 miles per hour. He said that Engineman Hunter appeared normal in every respect and that he was sure the engineman knew the location of Grant.

Engineman Edwards of Extra 509 stated that he entered the service of the Louisiana & Arkansas Railway September 23, 1906, after having had more than 30 years previous experience on other lines. At Trout he received a copy of order No. 38 from Conductor Alsup at 8:12 a.m., which contained authority for his train to run extra to Georgetown and required Train No. 51 to wait at Grant until 9:01 a.m. for his train, which allowed ample time for his train to reach Grant. He understood the order and read it aloud in the presence of the fireman and conductor. He made a running test of the brakes soon after leaving Trout and also used the brakes to reduce speed at 3 other locations and the brakes worked properly. He was approaching the point of accident at a speed of between 15 and 20 miles per hour when the fireman called a warning; he placed the brake valve in emergency position, stepped to the fireman's side of the engine and saw Train No. 51 approaching about 6 car lengths away at a speed of between 25 and 30 miles per hour. He said that the speed of his train had been reduced to between 5 and 8 miles per hour at that time.

Conductor Alsup and Brakeman Brothers, of Extra 509, verified the statement of Engineman Edwards regarding the air test and the operation of the train after leaving Trout. The first intimation they had of impending danger was when the brakes were applied in emergency and they heard one short blast sounded on the engine whistle. Conductor Alsup estimated the speed of his train to have been about 12 miles per hour when the brakes were applied and thought the train had nearly stopped when the collision occurred, while Brakeman Brothers estimated the speed to have been between 15 and 18 miles per hour when the brakes were applied and thought this had been reduced to about 10 miles per hour when the collision occurred.

Operator Lewis stated that he had been in the service of the Missouri Pacific Railroad Company for about 20 years, the last 5 of which he had served as joint agent-operator at Georgetown for the Missouri Pacific and the Louisiana & Arkansas Railways, in which capacity he handles train orders for both lines. On the

morning of the accident he copied train orders Nos. 38 and 39 addressed to Train No. 51 and he folded a copy of each, together with a clearance card, separately for the engineman and the conductor. As the train approached his office he personally delivered to Conductor Hughes, who was on the station platform, the folded orders and clearance cards for both himself and the engineman, and then returned to the office. He said nothing to Conductor Hughes regarding the contents of the orders but stated that he saw him reading them as soon as they were delivered and that he had no reason to believe that the orders were not understood or that they would not be complied with. Operator Lewis had never been examined on the rules of the Louisiana & Arkansas Railway but was examined on the Missouri Pacific rules annually and he thought that the Louisiana & Arkansas rules were similar to those of the Missouri Pacific. He stated that he had copied approximately 3 Form 19 orders per month, for delivery to trains at his station, which restricted the rights of trains at Grant.

Dispatcher Hill stated that he had been employed by the Louisiana & Arkansas Railway for a period of twenty seven years, five of which he had served as chief train dispatcher, two as trainmaster and the remaining twenty years he had served as a train dispatcher handling the movement of trains on the Vidalia District. He was thoroughly familiar with the district and also with the operating rules. Extra 509 was a traveling switch engine working out of Searcy, near Trout, on the Vidalia District, and performed switching service and handled local cars at various stations in that immediate vicinity. Dispatcher Hill went on duty at 8:00 a.m. on the morning of the accident and a few minutes later he learned that Engine 509 was to make a movement between Trout and Georgetown. At this time Train No. 51 had left Packton, the last open office north of Georgetown; he therefore placed order No. 38, Form 19, for delivery to Train No. 51 at Georgetown, making the order complete to Train No. 51 at 8:08 a.m. and completing it to Extra 509 at Trout at 8:30 a.m. This was in accord with a practice of long standing as it has been customary for, a number of years, to restrict the movement of trains by the use of form 19 orders, at any point where trains could clear, and he considered this a safe practice. The operating rules provide for the use of both form 31 and form 19 train orders, and for other than certain specific instances provided for by rule, the use of either form is optional with the dispatcher; the specific instances in which the rules require the use of a form 31 order do not include a situation such as was involved in connection with the issuance of order No. 38. He stated that he knew the employees in train and engine service at that time were new men, and said that train dispatchers were not advised regarding the qualifications of the men other than being told what employees had passed examinations on train rules. Conductor Hughes and Engineman Hunter had been running on the Vidalia District for about 2

weeks and he thought they were familiar with that part of the road; for this reason he did not consider it necessary to exercise any extra precautions when issuing orders to them.

Chief Dispatcher Martin stated that placing an order for delivery to a train at Georgetown, which restricted the right of that train at Grant, was in line with past practice and he did not consider that this created a hazardous situation.

Superintendent Johnson stated that on September 19, 1936, the employees in train and engine service went out on strike. During the first three weeks of the strike no train was operated unless piloted by some official or other employee well acquainted with the road. Later when new employees were hired they were examined on the operating rules and after passing such examinations they were told to make at least one student trip over the road with the men first hired; after doing this if they then felt competent they were sent out in actual service without further examination. Special precautions were taken, however, to see that no train was sent out in charge of conductor and engineman neither of whom had had actual previous experience in charge of a train. Under normal conditions employees were thoroughly examined on their knowledge of the physical characteristics of the road before being permitted to enter road service, but due to the emergency and the urgent need for men, it was impossible to follow the methods usually employed for this purpose. He stated that he would not expect a man with the limited experience of Conductor Hughes to be familiar with the location of all the spur tracks, business tracks, etc., on the district, and he considered that the train dispatcher exercised poor judgment in establishing a waiting point at a business track instead of at a siding shown on the timetable for meeting and passing trains, and further that he also exercised poor judgment in using a form 19 order instead of a form 31 order for the purpose, although under normal conditions and when dealing with regular employees he did not consider that there was any hazard in restricting the rights of a train at a business track with a form 19 order.

Superintendent of Transportation Garrett stated that the Coroner of Grant Parish turned over to him the clearance card and the copies of train orders Nos. 38 and 39, which were issued to Engineman Hunter at Georgetown and which were removed from the engineman's clothing soon after his death. All of these papers were identical with the copies on file in the office at Georgetown.

A check of the Company's records was made by the Commission's inspectors to ascertain what experience the members of the crew of Train No. 51 had had that would qualify them for road service on the Vidalia District and the following information was obtained:

each employee had had a number of years experience in railroad service on other lines; Engineman Hunter had made one round trip over the Vidalia District on October 8-10th to learn the road; he then began running regularly on October 20 and had made 6 round trips as engineman. Head Brakeman Newsome was making his initial trip. According to the statement of Fireman O'Brien he had made 5 round trips over the Vidalia District. According to the statement of Rear Brakeman Hobson he had made 4 round trips over the Vidalia District. Conductor Hughes had made 1 round trip to learn the road and 2 round trips as conductor over the Vidalia District prior to the accident.

A check of the dispatcher's train order books was also made to ascertain to what extent orders were issued which restricted the rights of trains at business tracks. Between July 15 and November 8, 1936, 12 such orders had been issued, 6 of which were issued to Train No. 51 at Georgetown and restricted the rights of that train at Grant. However, since the date of the strike but one order restricting the rights of Train No. 51 at Grant had been issued to that train at Georgetown and no orders containing restrictions at a business track had been issued to a train of which Engineman Hunter or Conductor Hughes had been in charge.

Discussion

On September 19, 1936, employees in train and engine service on this railway went out on strike and at the time of this accident trains were operated by men hired after that date. During the first three weeks of the strike all trains were piloted by an official or some other employee thoroughly familiar with the road. Employees who were hired subsequent to the first three weeks of the strike, after passing satisfactory examinations on operating rules, were instructed to make at least one student trip over the road with the men first hired and after this was done they were then sent out in actual service without being further questioned as to their knowledge of the road. Although the employees involved in this accident were experienced in railroad service, they had had but little experience on the district on which they were operating. Engineman Hunter had made seven round trips; Fireman O'Brien had made four; Head Brakeman Newsome had made none; Rear Brakeman Hobson had made four and Conductor Hughes had made three.

It appears to have been the practice on this road for a number of years to establish waiting points for trains at any point where a train could clear, in addition to points provided by rule for this purpose. Following this practice, order No. 38 was issued to Train No. 51 at Georgetown, requiring that train to wait at Grant, located 3,100 feet south of Georgetown, until 9:01 a.m. for Extra 509 North. Copies of this order for the engineman and the conductor,

together with another order, No. 39, changing a meeting point between Train No. 51 and Train No. 52, were handed to Conductor Hughes of Train No. 51 while he was on the station platform and just as his engine was closely approaching the depot. He handed the engineman's copy of the orders and clearance card to the head brakeman as the engine passed and then ran ahead to flag a highway crossing at the opposite end of the depot platform, remaining there giving hand signals until the caboose was spotted at the platform, after which he boarded the caboose and began reading his orders as the train was departing; there is some uncertainty as to whether or not the orders were seen by the rear brakeman. Not being familiar with the location of Grant, Conductor Hughes consulted the timetable and as the place was not a station but was listed in the back of the timetable this required some time; when he finally found it his train had already passed the point.

It also appears that Engineman Hunter paid no attention to the orders received at Georgetown until after he had spotted the caboose at the depot and the train was finally leaving to m. He then read aloud order No. 39, which changed his meeting point with Train No. 52, and placed the orders in his pocket, the fireman or head brakeman not having read them. Both of these men heard him read order No. 39 but they were unaware of the existence of order No. 38. Just why Engineman Hunter failed to read order No. 38 aloud, or whether he read the order at all, is not known; however, as a correct copy of each order was later found in a pocket of his clothing, together with a clearance card containing the number of each order written thereon, it would appear that he failed to read order 38.

Rule 211 requires enginemen to show train orders to firemen and when practicable to forward trainmen. Conductors must show train orders, when practicable, to trainmen. Fireman and trainmen must read train orders aloud to the engineman or conductor. This rule was not complied with, and it does not appear that any member of the crew of Train No. 51 read the orders immediately upon receipt or before their train departed from Georgetown. The operating rules permit the delivery of a form 19 order to a moving train, and the possession of a clearance card as authority to pass a train order signal in the stop position; in the absence of any extra precautions being taken to insure delivery, which is required by the rules when the order is immediately restricting, the receipt of such an order, accompanied by a clearance card, might easily lead a crew to believe that the order was one which did not require immediate action.

Rule 818, applying to train dispatchers, reads: "When a crew is not well acquainted with the district, or when necessary to move an engine without a conductor, extra precautions must be taken to safeguard such train."

In no sense of the word could the crew of Train No. 51 be considered as being "well acquainted with the district", yet the train dispatcher handled the situation in the manner he would have followed had he been dealing with men well acquainted with the road; this was not in accord with the requirements of Rule 818.

The underlying cause of this accident was the use of employees in train and engine service who were not properly qualified for the positions they were holding. While this condition resulted from the fact that the train and engine service employees on this railway were on strike, the railway company should not jeopardize the safety of train operation by the use in responsible positions of persons whose lack of proper experience is apt at any time to result in the occurrence of accidents.

Conclusion

This accident was caused by failure to obey a wait order.

Respectfully submitted,

W. J. PATTERSON,

Director.