INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY CONCERNING AN ACCIDENT ON THE NEW YORK CENTRAL RAILROAD AT CORNING, N.Y., ON MARCH 27, 1935.

May 22, 1935.

To the Commission:

On March 27, 1935, there was a collision between part of a freight train, which was being set out by a road engine, and a helper engine shoving cabooses, in the yard of the New York Central Railroad at Corning, N. Y., which resulted in the death of 1 employee and the injury of 1 employee.

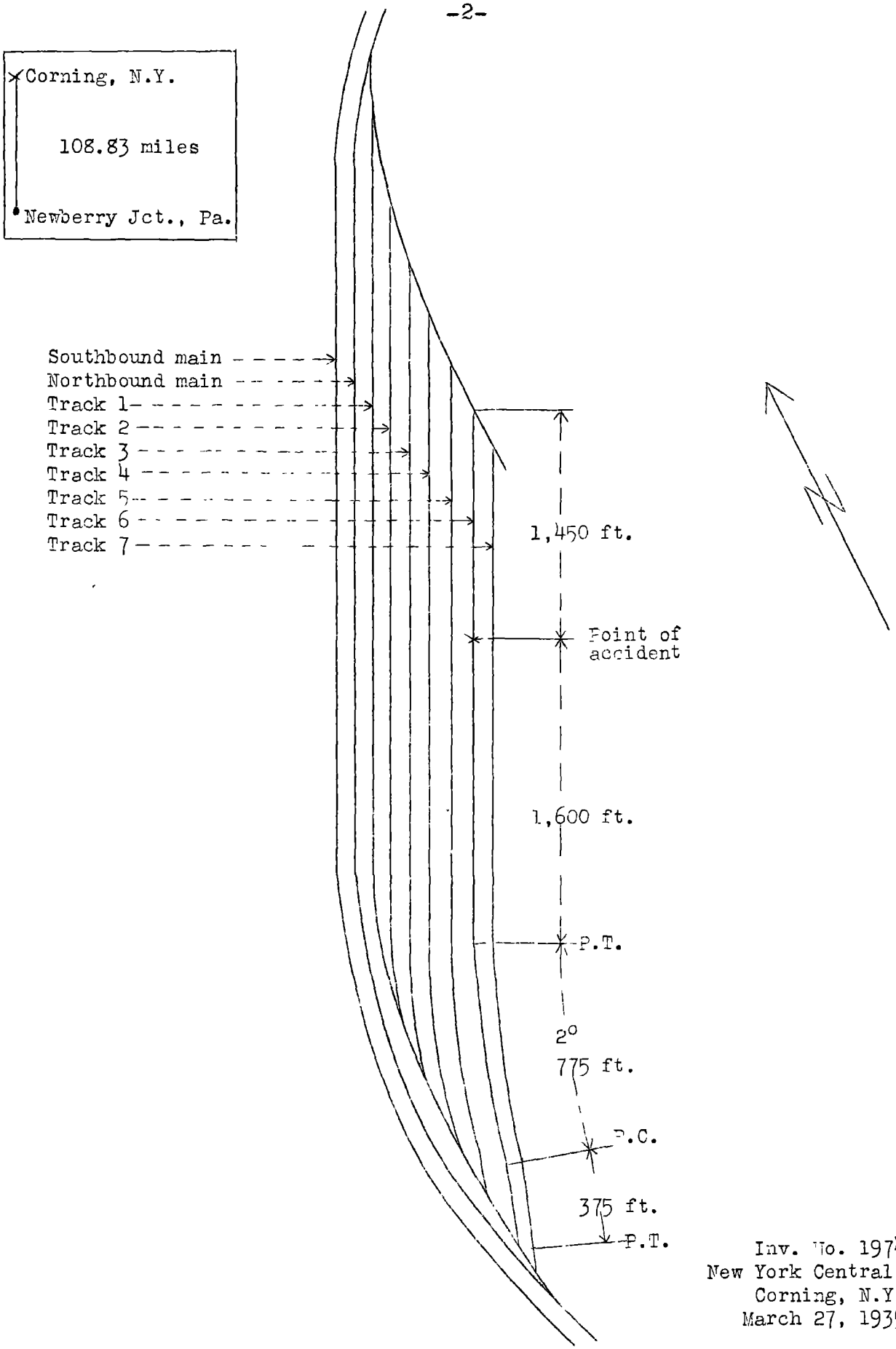
Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Pennsylvania Division extending between Newberry Junction, Pa., and Corning, N. Y., a distance of 108.83 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; the collision occurred on a yard track, block signals not being involved. Track 6 in the north yard at Corning parallels the main tracks on the east and is approximately 4,200 feet in length; the accident occurred on this track about 1,450 feet from its northern end. Beginning at the south switch, this track is tangent for a distance of 375 feet, followed by a 2° curve to the right 775 feet in length, then tangent track to the north switch, the accident occurring on this latter tangent at a point about 1,600 feet from its southern end. The grade is generally ascending for north-bound trains, being 0.52 percent at the point of accident.

The weather was clear and it was dark at the time of the accident, which occurred about 7 p.m.

Description

Train HBS-1, a north-bound freight train, consisted of 81 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 2707, and was in charge of Conductor Benedict and Engineman Hale. This train arrived at Corning at 6:50 p.m.; after cutting off the caboose at the south end of the yard the train continued to the north end of the yard where it was stopped on the main track. The first 39 cars were cut off from the balance of the train, pulled beyond the lead-track switch, then backed through the lead track and were moving into track 6, at an estimated speed of 8 or 10 miles per hour,



Inv. No. 1974
New York Central R.R.
Corning, N.Y.
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when the leading car collided with cabooses being handled by the helper engine.

Helper engine 2709, headed north, was in charge of Engineman Bills and Fireman Powell. This engine was standing at the south end of the south yard, with two cabooses coupled ahead of it, when Train HBS-1 left its caboose standing on the main track; the helper engine then moved out of the yard tracks, coupled to that caboose and the three cabooses were then shoved into track 6 at the south end of the north yard, being stopped just before the leading caboose was struck by the cut of cars from Train HBS-1.

The leading car and the lead truck of the second car were derailed but remained in line with the track and were only slightly damaged. All three cabooses were derailed; the leading caboose stopped with its forward end against a car standing on track 8 and its rear end across track 7, the second caboose was across tracks 5 and 6 and the rear end of the last caboose rested on the end sill of the engine. The first two cabooses were destroyed, the rear caboose was considerably damaged and the engine sustained some damage. The employee killed was a flagman who was in the rear caboose and the employee injured was a conductor who was in the second caboose.

Summary of Evidence

Engineman Hale, of Train HBS-1, stated that upon arrival at Corning the train stopped on the north-bound main track at the north end of the yard and after the cut of cars was pulled ahead preparatory to backing into the yard the engine was around a curve to the right and he could see back a distance of only 12 or 14 car lengths. When he received a back-up signal from a brakeman on the train at about that distance from the engine he started backing the cut of cars into the yard and when the engine reached a point about 15 car lengths north of the north switch of track 6 he felt a sudden jolt and immediately closed the throttle and applied the independent engine brakes; he estimated the speed at the time of the impact at 8 or 10 miles per hour.

Fireman Brooks, of Train HBS-1, stated that when the train stopped at Corning the engine was approximately 35 car lengths north of the north lead-track switch. On account of his position on the outside of the curve he could not see the brakeman on top of the train, but after the head end was pulled beyond the switch it was backed into the lead track at a speed of about 8 miles per hour and while this movement was being made he felt a slight shock. He did not know whether the track on which the cars were being shoved was clear but said that during the past, numerous movements of this kind had been made by Train HBS-1 and in case the track on which the cars were to be set off was occupied the

yardmaster always told them how much clearance was available.

Hard Brakeman Dwyer, of Train HBS-1, stated that after the train stopped and a switchman uncoupled the forward portion of the train, it was then backed into the yard at a speed of about 8 or 10 miles per hour. He was on about the twentieth car in position to transmit signals to the engineman and someone was riding the leading car, but that person got off near the north switch of track 6 and the movement was continued without anybody on the leading car. Brakeman Dwyer also got off at the north end of track 6, for the purpose of cutting off the engine as soon as the cars were into clear, and did not see the cabooses approaching on the same track. He said it was the practice to shove cars into the yard tracks with no one riding the leading car, particularly with the train involved, providing the track to be used was unoccupied, and on this occasion he had been informed by two switchmen that track 6 was clear. It was his understanding that Rule 103, which requires a trainman to ride the leading car of cars being pushed except when shifting or making up trains in yards, applies in cases when an engine with cars coupled to it picks up other cars or backs up to couple with main part of train, but does not apply when cars are being pushed into any of these yard tracks, whether clear or occupied. He thought, however, that it would be safer if a man rode the leading car. He also stated that had he been in charge of placing the caboose of Train HBS-1 in the yard, and having no instructions to the contrary, he would have continued through the yard with the intention of coupling it to cars which might be occupying the track being used or else take it to the north end of the yard.

Yard Brakeman Griswold stated that when Train HBS-1 arrived he uncoupled the cars to be set out, rode the rear car to the main track switch, and opened it to permit the cars to be placed on track 6. He also rode the same car when the back-up movement was started; he knew that track 6 was clear at the time the train arrived and afterwards looked twice but did not see any cabooses moving northward on that track and got off at track 6 switch; he thought he could see for a distance of 20 or 25 car lengths. He has worked in Corning yard at intervals during the past 4 or 5 years and it has always been the practice to set cars out of Train HBS-1 with no one riding the leading car; he did not recall of any similar movements being made by other trains. He further stated that the caboose dropped from this train is generally shoved into some yard track occupied by cars and coupled to those cars, although in some instances it is shoved through to the north end of the yard, but in that event it is by order of the yardmaster.

Flagman Peck of Train HBS-1, stated that he rode the rear car of the train to the north end of the yard for the purpose of setting hand brakes on cars left on the main track while cars from

the head end were being set out; he usually rides the inbound engine back to the south end of the yard, returns to the caboose and then goes home but in this case a brakeman shouted to him and told him where the caboose was located; after setting brakes he got off, crossed over between cars on another track, and had just got down upon the ground when the collision occurred; he thought the cabooses were moving at a speed of 3 or 4 miles per hour at the time of the accident and that the cars from the north were moving at about the same speed. He said it was quite dark and his range of vision was limited to 500 feet or less.

Conductor Benedict, of Train HBS-1, stated that after the caboose was cut off at the south end of the yard at Corning, he went to the south-bound shanty and reported to the dispatcher; he remained at the shanty to await the return of the engine to the south end of the yard after disposing of the train, at which time he was to report the crew off duty, this being the end of their trip. He said that he is in charge of the train until the engine returns to the south end of the yard and is responsible for the head end if it is to be set off in any of the yard tracks, but in making movements of this kind a yard brakeman is supposed to ride the rear car of the cut to set the brakes and the head brakeman of his crew is at the head end to cut off the engine after the cars are placed on a yard track; he did not know whether this practice had been followed, however, as he is on the extra list and makes only about one trip each week on this train.

Engineman Bills, of helper engine 2709, stated that after picking up two cabooses in the south-bound yard he moved out upon the main track and coupled to the caboose of Train HBS-1, then entered the north-bound yard with the three cabooses ahead of the engine and proceeded northward on track 6 at a speed of 5 or 6 miles per hour. Upon reaching a point about 50 car lengths from the south switch he received a reduce-speed signal from Brakeman Scranton, who was riding the leading caboose, and he slowed down to 2 or 3 miles per hour. Shortly afterwards the brakeman jumped off and gave a quick stop signal and he stopped within a distance of about 10 feet. The headlight of his engine was burning dimly but due to the cabooses ahead of the engine its rays did not shine on the cars moving from the opposite direction and he did not see them prior to the accident. Similar movements with the helper engine have been made on previous occasions, except that it is the practice if the track is occupied by cars for the caboose to be coupled to them; if the track is unoccupied the caboose is left just into clear at the south end of the yard track.

The statements of Fireman Powell, of engine 2709, substantiated those of Engineman Bills as to the movements made by their engine prior to the accident. He said it was the custom in disposing of a caboose from a north-bound train either to set it off

just into clear at the south end of a yard track unattached or to couple it to a train which may extend to the south end of the yard.

Brakeman Scranton stated that he cut off the caboose from Train HBS-1 and while lining the switches for the helper engine to pick up the caboose on the main track he was instructed by Flagman Ernst to set the caboose off on track 6; he understood Flagman Ernst had received these instructions from the switch tender. Flagman Ernst was assigned to the outbound crew of this train but was killed in the accident. He rode on the forward platform of the leading caboose during the movement through track 6, at a speed of about 4 or 5 miles per hour, and when he observed cars on this track, about 15 or 20 car lengths distant, he gave the engineman a slow signal, thinking that the cars were standing as he did not see anyone on them. Upon reaching a point about 2 or 3 car lengths from the cars he saw that they were moving and he immediately jumped off and gave the engineman a stop signal; the cabooses were stopped before the collision occurred. He also stated that movements of this kind are made frequently, and it is the practice to couple the caboose to cars on the yard track, or if the track is clear the caboose is taken to the north end unless instructed to leave it at the south end; on the day of the accident he did not know and was not told whether there were any cars on track 6, and his purpose in moving so far up the yard was to find cars to couple to, or to take the caboose to the north end of the track.

Switchtender Dodge stated that he received instructions from the yardmaster to have the caboose of Train HBS-1 placed on the south end of track 6; he asked Flagman Ernst, of the outbound crew to convey these instructions to Brakeman Scranton; at the time of this conversation he thought Flagman Ernst fully understood the instructions. Switchtender Dodge further stated that sometimes a caboose taken from an inbound train is placed in the south end of the yard and at other times it is shoved to the north end, but the latter movements are made only by direction of the yardmaster.

Yardmaster Hardenburg stated that there is no designated caboose track in the south end of the yard at Corning; cabooses from north-bound trains are placed on yard tracks at locations designated by the yardmaster. In this case he instructed Switchtender Dodge to place the caboose of Train HBS-1 just into clear on the south end of track 6. He said it is not necessary that cabooses be coupled to cars standing on such tracks nor to take them to the extreme north end of the yard tracks, except when ordered to do so by the yardmaster. He also told the two switchmen who were engaged in setting out cars from the head end of the train that track 6 was clear. He said that it was not customary for anyone to ride the leading car of a cut of cars being set out

on a yard track when the track is clear and he did not think that Rule 103 applied to movements of that kind.

Discussion

The intended movements of equipment involved in this accident consisted of setting out a cut of 39 cars from the head end of train HBS-1 on the north end of track 6 of the north yard at Corning, and placing the caboose from the same train on the south end of the same track. The capacity of track 6, approximately 90 cars, was ample to permit of these movements, and both movements were being made at the same time. However, the instructions of the yardmaster as to placing the caboose were issued to Switchtender Dodge, who communicated them to Flagman Ernst, who in turn relayed them to Brakeman Scranton, the employee who actually directed the movement; during this transmission of instructions from the yardmaster to the employee who was to execute them an error was made or a misunderstanding occurred as Brakeman Scranton understood only that the caboose was to be set out on track 6, instead of on the south end of track 6 as intended. He thereupon proceeded northward on track 6, expecting to couple the caboose to any cars which might be occupying that track, or, if it was clear, to go to the north end of the yard; he said he understood that this was required, whereas according to the yardmaster there is no such requirement.

Rule 103 reads as follows:

> "When cars are pushed by an engine, except when shifting or making up trains in yards, a trainman must take a conspicuous position on the front of the leading car."

Yardmaster Hardenburg, Head Brakeman Dwyer and Yard Brakeman Griswold were of the opinion that this rule does not require a man to ride the leading car in a movement such as setting out the cut of cars involved in this accident, and the evidence indicates that it is common practice to set out cars from Train HBS-1 without a man riding the head end; Conductor Benedict said that there should have been a man on the leading car.

The practice of shoving cars into a track without a man on the leading car is dangerous, whether inside or outside of a yard, especially after dark, and in this case there also was a marked lack of uniformity in understanding of various employees involved concerning the application of rules and requirements governing yard movements. The indiscriminate placing of occupied cabooses in a train yard, as disclosed by this investigation, is dangerous.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by a misunderstanding of instructions of a yardmaster concerning one yard movement and failure to provide adequate safeguards for another yard movement.

Respectfully submitted,

W. J. PATTERSON,

Director.