

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY CONCERNING AN
ACCIDENT ON THE NORFOLK SOUTHERN RAILROAD AT GRIMESLAND,
N. C., ON FEBRUARY 12, 1934.

April 18, 1934.

To the Commission:

On February 12, 1934, there was a head-end collision between two freight trains on the Norfolk Southern Railroad at Grimesland, N. C., which resulted in the injury of two employees.

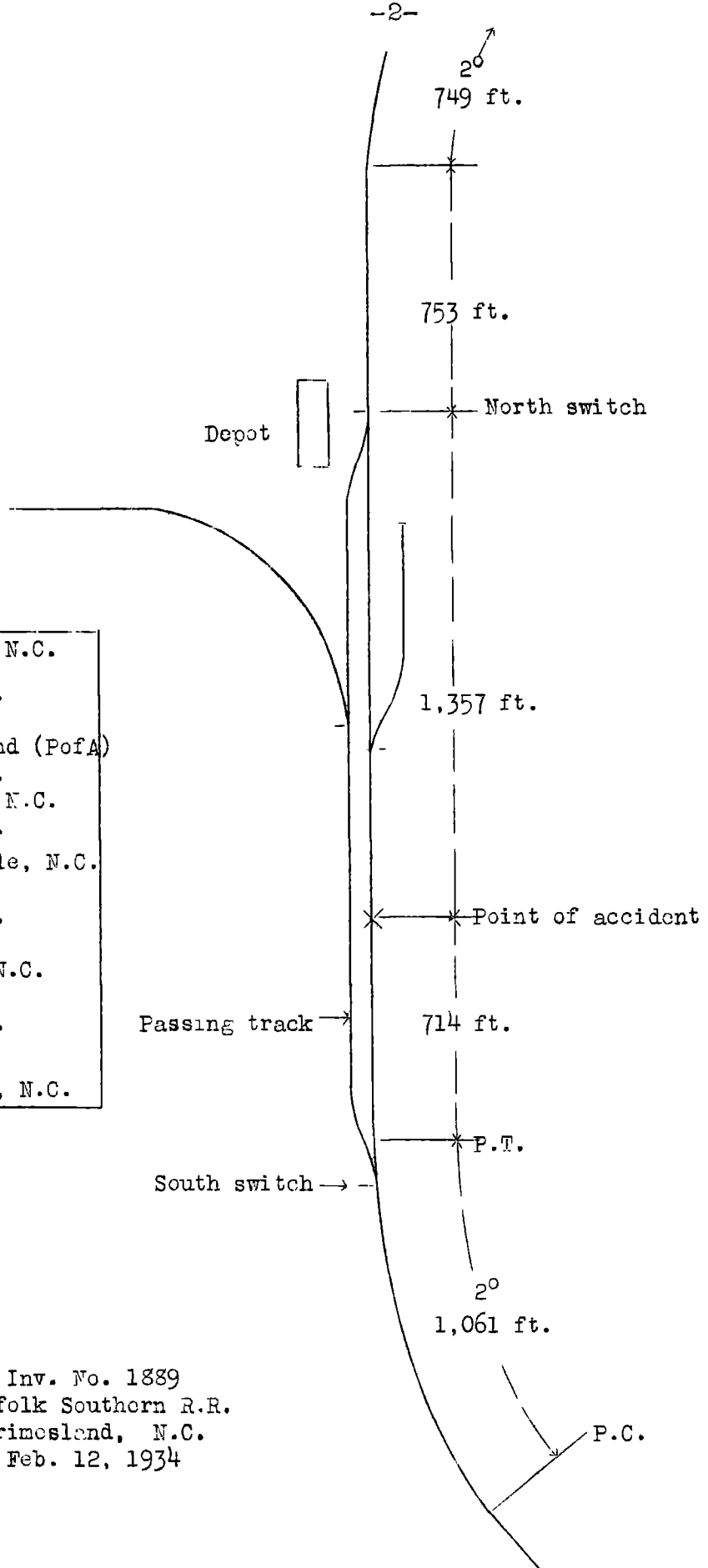
Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Raleigh District of the Western District, extending between Marsden and Glenwood, N. C., a distance of 101.6 miles; in the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. Northbound trains are superior by direction. The accident occurred on the main track, between switches of the passing track at Grimesland, at a point 1,357 feet south of the north switch; the passing track is 2,187 feet in length and parallels the main track on the west. Approaching this point from the north, the track is tangent for a considerable distance, followed by a 2° curve to the left 749 feet in length, and then tangent track for a distance of 753 feet to the north switch of the passing track and for an additional distance of 2,071 feet, the accident occurring on this tangent at a point 2,110 feet south of its extreme northern end. Approaching from the south, the track is tangent for a considerable distance, followed by a 2° curve to the right 1,061 feet in length, the south switch of the passing track being located on this curve at a point 116 feet from its northern end; north of the curve the track is tangent for a distance of 714 feet to the point of accident. The grade is level.

There is no open telegraph office at Grimesland; the depot is located on the west side of the track opposite the north switch of the passing track.

The weather was clear and it was dark at the time of the accident, which occurred about 6:32 p.m.

• Marsden, N.C.	6.5 mi.
* Grimesland (PofA)	5.0 mi.
• Simpson, N.C.	5.9 mi.
• Greenville, N.C.	36.1 mi.
• Wilson, N.C.	48.1 mi.
• Glenwood, N.C.	



Inv. No. 1889
 Norfolk Southern R.R.
 Grimesland, N.C.
 Feb. 12, 1934

Description

Southbound freight train Extra 101 consisted of engine 101, hauling a caboose, and was in charge of Conductor Sanders and Engineman Tunstall. At Marsden, its initial terminal, the crew received train order 60, form 19, directing Train no. 64 to wait at Grimesland for Extra 101 until 6:45 p.m. Extra 101 departed from Marsden, 6.5 miles north of Grimesland, at 6:20 p.m., according to the train sheet, but on reaching Grimesland, instead of heading in on the passing track at the north switch, it continued southward on the main track and collided with Train no. 64 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 5 and 10 miles per hour.

Northbound freight Train no. 64 consisted of 20 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 545, and was in charge of Conductor Goodman and Engineman Ray. At Wilson, 47 miles south of Grimesland, the crew received copy of train order 60, form 31, previously mentioned, and left that point at 4:35 p.m., according to the train sheet, 45 minutes late. Just before reaching Grimesland trouble developed with the headlight and it went out. Train no. 64 passed by the south switch of the passing track and moved cautiously northward on the main track, it being intended to stop at the north switch as required by the wait order, in the event Extra 101 had not yet arrived and endeavor to locate the trouble. Extra 101 was seen approaching, in the vicinity of the north switch, and on definitely realizing that it was continuing on the main track the engineman of Train no. 64 immediately brought his train to a stop and it was standing when struck by Extra 101.

None of the equipment in either train was derailed, while only slight damage was sustained by the engines. The employees injured were the conductor and fireman of Extra 101.

Summary of evidence

Engineman Tunstall, of Extra 101, stated that Conductor Sanders personally delivered and read the orders to him at Marsden, but while doing so the safety valve popped off and drowned out the voice of the conductor; after the conductor finished reading, however, the engineman said "all right", indicating that he understood the contents of the orders. Engineman Tunstall did not then read the orders himself, but handed them to Fireman Edmondson, saying that the fireman read train order 60 as directing Train no. 64 to wait at Greenville until 6:45 p.m.; the fireman then returned the orders to the engineman and the latter also read the wait order as Greenville, instead of Grimesland. After departing from Marsden and before getting to the passing track switch at the south end of the

yard, the engineman looked at the orders the second time and again misread the wait order. On reaching a point about 1 mile north of the north switch of the passing track at Grimesland the speed of Extra 101 was about 25 miles per hour; the engineman looked at his watch and it was 6:30 p.m. and he remarked to the fireman that he had 15 minutes in which to go to Simpson, 5 miles south of Grimesland, for Train no. 64, and then closed the throttle and permitted the train to drift. The first he knew of anything wrong was when his headlight shone upon some object which he could not at first identify, at which time his engine was about 350 feet south of the north switch; he immediately applied the brakes in emergency and when he did so he saw that the object in front of him was an engine; he estimated the speed of his train at the time of the accident to have been about 10 miles per hour. Engineman Tunstall stated that even after he saw the opposing engine it did not occur to him that he had misread the wait order, but on reading the order again after the accident he saw that it specified Grimesland. Engineman Tunstall was of the opinion that when the fireman misread the wait order to him, it had a tendency to establish the wait order in his mind as applying at Greenville, and that subsequently when the engineman personally looked at the orders he read first the running order, directing his train to run extra from Marsden to Greenville, and then the wait order also as applying at Greenville, although he in no way attached any blame for his own error to the fireman, as he said that he had full opportunity to read the wait order correctly and that it was legibly written.

Fireman Edmondson, of Extra 101, a promoted engineman, corroborated the statements of Engineman Tunstall; the fireman could not account for having misread the wait order unless it was that the names of the stations in both the running order and the wait order started with a "G", and it was not until after the accident that he discovered the mistake.

Conductor Sanders, of Extra 101, received the orders at Marsden and after reading them he repeated them to the engineman, brakeman and flagman and then placed his own set on the bunk in the caboose; before leaving Marsden he had some conversation about the wait order with Trainmaster Pettus, who rode in the caboose on this trip to instruct the flagman in his duties. Approaching Grimesland the conductor told the brakeman to be prepared to head in at the north switch and the first he knew of anything wrong was when the train passed the depot; he immediately jumped up to apply the brakes from the rear; at that time the trainmaster was standing in the door, and the conductor then started for the cupola and about that time the accident occurred. Conductor Sanders did not know definitely whether the engineman had sounded a meeting point signal on

the whistle, although under the impression that he had, nor did he have any understanding with the engineman before leaving Marsden as to where their train would go for Train no. 64. Conductor Sanders said that no one rode in the caboose cupola, as the train consisted of only the engine and the caboose. He estimated the speed to have been about 25 or 30 miles per hour approaching Grimesland and about 10 miles per hour at the time of the accident.

Head Brakeman Harris, of Extra 101, stated that he did not personally read the orders, although the conductor informed him as to the contents, and he did not recall the conductor having instructed him to head in at Grimesland as the train approached that point. When about 2 miles north of Grimesland he looked out to make sure of his location and then sat down to wait for the engineman to reduce speed so that he could run ahead and open the switch. He sat there a short time and then stepped out on the rear platform and just as he did so the caboose was passing the depot, whereupon he immediately inquired of the conductor whether the wait order contained instructions to run by and back in, or to head in, and when the conductor informed him that it required their train to head in it was then too late to apply the brakes from the rear in time to avert the accident. He could not recall having heard a meeting point whistle signal sounded.

Flagman Sutton, of Extra 101, stated that the conductor informed him as to the contents of the orders and he understood that the wait applied at Grimesland. This was his first trip in this territory and the trainmaster was instructing him in the method of making out wheel reports. Just prior to the accident the brakeman asked the conductor how the wait order read, after which the brakeman went out on the rear platform of the caboose and the flagman followed him; the accident occurred immediately afterwards, at which time the flagman estimated the speed to have been about 10 miles per hour.

Trainmaster Pettus had read and thoroughly understood the orders, and while instructing the flagman he heard the conductor tell the brakeman to go out and be ready to head in. The speed was about 25 or 30 miles per hour and the engineman closed the throttle when about 800 feet north of the passing track, which led the trainmaster to assume that Train no. 64 had arrived and that some member of the crew of that train had lined the switch for Extra 101 to head in. Being of the opinion, however, that the speed was too high for the siding the trainmaster started toward the rear of the caboose in order to apply the brakes, but before he got the door open the brakes were applied in emergency and then the accident occurred, at which time he estimated the speed to have been about 5 or 6

miles per hour. He had heard several road crossing whistle signals sounded between Marsden and Grimesland but did not hear a meeting point signal.

Engineman Ray, of Train no. 64, stated that when about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile south of Grimesland the headlight on his engine flickered and went out, following which it lighted again and finally it went out and stayed out. He drifted along at a speed of about 3 or 4 miles per hour while the fireman went out on the front end and endeavored to locate the trouble, it being the engineman's intention to proceed slowly and stop at the north switch, and in the event the fireman had not found the trouble by that time the engineman was going to look for it at that point. On passing the south switch, however, the engineman saw Extra 101 approaching on the curve in the vicinity of the north switch and when he definitely realized that it was continuing on the main track he immediately stopped his own train and twice whistled the opposing train to stop.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by failure of the crew of Extra 101 to comply with a wait order.

The conductor read the orders to the engineman and the latter acknowledged them without having heard all that the conductor said and then turned the orders over to his fireman, who misread the wait order, following which the engineman read the orders and made the same mistake as the fireman. It was not until after the accident that either the engineman or the fireman discovered the error.

While the members of the engine crew made the error which resulted directly in the occurrence of this accident, this error should have been detected and the accident prevented had other members of the crew complied with the rules. Conductor Sanders said he did not have any understanding with the engineman as to where they were going for Train no. 64, although it was required by the rules that such an understanding should be had; neither did the conductor make any attempt to stop the train when approaching Grimesland, although under the rules when a meeting-point whistle signal is not sounded by the engineman the conductor is required to stop the train at once; it is also provided in the rules that the proper place for the conductor of a freight train is in the cupola and there did not appear to be any reason why some one should not have been there, in which event it could readily have been discovered that the engineman was not going to stop and proper steps to apply the brakes could have been taken accordingly. The rules also require brakemen, when necessary, to call the conductor's attention to the orders; Brakeman Harris had not heard a

meeting-point whistle signal sounded yet he did not say anything to the conductor about the orders until the caboose was passing the switch where the train should have taken siding.

The flagman and trainmaster were more or less engrossed in instructions being given to the flagman, but both of them were in position to detect the errors of the engineman and fireman. Violations of the rules referred to made it possible for the mistakes of the engineman and the fireman to go uncorrected. All of the men involved were experienced men but had not been examined on the operating rules since May, 1928, and in view of the violations of various rules referred to above, it would appear desirable for this railroad company to take some action with a view to keeping the rules more firmly in the minds of its employees.

Respectfully submitted,

W. J. PATTERSON,

Director.