

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

WASHINGTON

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INVESTIGATION NO. 2586

THE SEABOARD AIR LINE RAILWAY COMPANY

REPORT IN RE ACCIDENT

NEAR ROANOKE RAPIDS, N. C., ON

MAY 6, 1942

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## SUMMARY

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Railroad: Seaboard Air Line

Date: May 6, 1942

Location: Roanoke Rapids, N. C.

Kind of accident: Head-end collision

Trains involved: Freight : Freight

Train numbers: Extra 436 South : Extra 444 North

Engine numbers: 436 : 444

Consist: 13 cars, cabooses : 34 cars, cabooses

Speed: 25-30 m. p. h. : 20-25 m. p. h.

Operation: Timetable and train orders, and manual-block system for following passenger trains only

Track: Single; 1° curve; 0.97 percent ascending grade southward

Weather: Cloudy

Time: About 7:07 p. m.

Casualties: 1 killed; 5 injured

Cause: Accident caused by lapse of authority of two opposing extra trains

Recommendation: That the Seaboard Air Line Railway Company establish an adequate block-signal system on the line involved in this accident

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

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INVESTIGATION NO. 2586

IN THE MATTER OF MAKING ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION REPORTS  
UNDER THE ACCIDENT REPORTS ACT OF MAY 6, 1910.

THE SEABOARD AIR LINE RAILWAY COMPANY

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July 14, 1942.

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Accident near Roanoke Rapids, N. C., on May 6, 1942, caused  
by lap of authority of two opposing extra trains.

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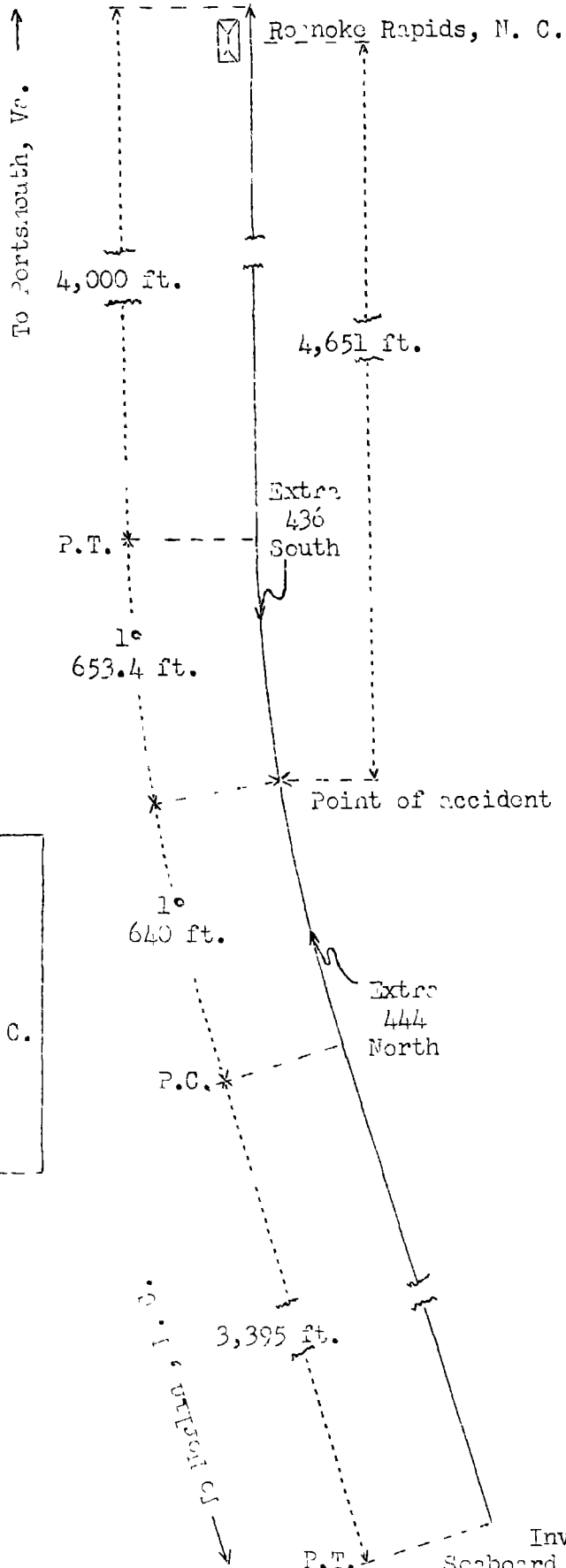
REPORT OF THE COMMISSION<sup>1</sup>

PATTERSON, Commissioner:

On May 6, 1942, there was a head-end collision between two freight trains on the Seaboard Air Line Railway near Roanoke Rapids, N. C., which resulted in the death of one employee and the injury of five employees.

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<sup>1</sup>Under authority of section 17 (2) of the Interstate Commerce Act the above-entitled proceeding was referred by the Commission to Commissioner Patterson for consideration and disposition.



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|---|-----------------------|-----------|
| ○ | Portsmouth, Va.       | 1.70 mi.  |
| ○ | Shops                 | 35.40 mi. |
| ○ | Franklin, Va.         | 45.60 mi. |
| ○ | Roanoke Rapids, N. C. | 0.88 mi.  |
| X | Point of accident     | 31.72 mi. |
| ○ | Norline, N. C.        |           |

Inv. No. 2586  
 Seaboard Air Line Railway  
 Roanoke Rapids, N. C.  
 May 6, 1942

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Virginia Division designated as the Portsmouth Sub-division, which extends between Norfolk, N. C., and Portsmouth, Va., a distance of 115.3 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, and a manual-block system for following passenger trains only. The accident occurred at a point 4,651 feet south of the station at Roanoke Rapids. As the point of accident is approached from the north there is a tangent about 4,000 feet in length, which is followed by a 1° curve to the left 653.4 feet to the point of accident and 640 feet beyond. As the point of accident is approached from the south there is a tangent 3,395 feet in length, which is followed by the curve on which the accident occurred. The grade for south-bound trains is 0.64 percent descending a distance of 1,750 feet and then is 0.97 percent ascending 525 feet to the point of accident. The grade for north-bound trains is 0.97 percent descending 4,400 feet to the point of accident.

Operating rules read in part as follows:

87. \* \* \*

Extra trains \* \* \* will be governed by train orders with respect to opposing extra trains.

FORMS  
OF  
TRAIN ORDERS

Form S-A. Fixing Meeting Points for Opposing trains.

Examples

(1) \* \* \*

Extra 307, North meet Extra 318, South  
at "K."

\* \* \*

Trains receiving these orders will run with respect to each other to the designated points and there meet in the manner prescribed by the rules.

TRAIN DISPATCHERS.

796. Dispatcher who is to be relieved must make a written transfer in ink in his order book of all outstanding orders, indicating such by their numbers only, and furnish the relieving dispatcher all necessary information. Relieving dispatcher must carefully read such orders as are transferred to him, checking the number and address of each in the transfer, and then sign such transfer. When an order is fulfilled dispatcher must check it off by writing his initials thereon. "X" drawn across the entire face of page, may be used to indicate that all orders up to and including that page have been fulfilled and that it is unnecessary for the relieving dispatcher to read back of such page.

In the vicinity of the point of accident the maximum authorized speed for freight trains is 30 miles per hour.

Description of Accident

Extra 436 South, a south-bound freight train, consisted of engine 436, 6 loaded and 7 empty cars and a caboose. At Shops, Va., 81 miles north of Roanoke Rapids, the crew received a clearance card together with three train orders, of which one was train order No. 650, Form 19, reading as follows:

Eng 436 Run extra Shops to Norlina

After a terminal air-brake test was made this train departed from Shops at 2:55 p. m., according to the dispatcher's record of movement of trains, departed from Franklin, 45.6 miles north of Roanoke Rapids, at 4:23 p. m., passed Roanoke Rapids, the last open office, at 7:05 p. m., according to the station record of train movements, and while moving at an estimated speed of 25 to 30 miles per hour it collided with Extra 444 North at a point 0.88 mile south of the station at Roanoke Rapids.

Extra 444 North, a north-bound freight train, consisted of engine 444, 34 loaded cars and a caboose. At Norlina, 32.6 miles south of Roanoke Rapids, the crew received a clearance card and train order No. 662, Form 19, which read as follows:

Eng 444 Run Extra  
Norlina to Shops and  
Meet Extra 756 South  
at Franklin

After a terminal air-brake test was made this train departed from Norlina, the last open office, at 5:42 p. m., according to the dispatcher's record of movement of trains, and while moving at an estimated speed of 20 to 25 miles per hour it collided with Extra 436 South.

Because of track curvature and trees adjacent to the track in the vicinity of the point of accident, the view of an approaching train from an engine moving in either direction is restricted to a distance of about 1,400 feet.

The force of the impact moved engine 436 backward a distance of 55 feet. Both engines were demolished. The first 6 cars of Extra 436 were derailed and demolished. The front truck of the seventh car and the rear truck of the twenty-third car were derailed. The first 22 cars of Extra 444 were derailed and demolished. The wreckage of both trains was contained within a distance of 425 feet.

It was cloudy at the time of the accident, which occurred about 7:07 p. m.

The employee killed was the engineer of Extra 436 South. The employees injured were the fireman and the front brakeman of Extra 436 South and the engineer, the fireman and the front brakeman of Extra 444 North.

#### Data

During the 30-day period preceding the day of the accident, the average daily movement over the line involved was 20.6 trains.

#### Discussion

The operating rules on the line involved provide that extra trains will be governed by train orders with respect to opposing extra trains.

The investigation disclosed that train order No. 650, which authorized the movement of Extra 436 South from Shops to Norlina, was issued by the first-trick dispatcher at 2:15 p. m. Extra 436 departed from Shops at 2:55 p. m., and from Franklin at 4:23 p. m., and the first-trick dispatcher recorded this information on the dispatcher's record of movement of trains. Train order No. 662, which authorized the movement of Extra 444 North from Norlina to Shops, was issued by the second-trick dispatcher at 5:29 p. m. Extra 436 South passed Roanoke Rapids, the last open office north of the point of accident, at 7:05 p. m., and Extra 444 North departed from Norlina, the last open office south of the point of accident, at 5:42 p. m. No provision was made to establish a meeting point or otherwise to protect the movement of these two opposing extra trains. This resulted in a lap of authority of the trains involved. The crew of either train did not know of the existence of the other train.

The view had by the members of the crews on the engines of both trains of the point where the collision occurred was restricted to a distance of about 1,400 feet. Action to stop their respective trains was taken by the engineers, but the distance was not sufficient to stop short of the point of collision.

According to the statement of the second-trick dispatcher, his duties included the supervision of the movement of trains on the Portsmouth and the Durham Sub-divisions. On the day of the accident he reported for duty at 4 p. m. and completed his check of the transfer of orders in the train-order book and of the dispatcher's record of movement of trains about 4:24 p. m. Extra 436 South was properly entered on the dispatcher's record of movement of trains and order No. 650 was properly recorded in the transfer. The movement of trains on the Durham Sub-division required his attention until about 5:25 p. m., when the operator at Norlina requested orders for the movement of Extra 444. When the dispatcher issued order No. 662, which authorized the movement of Extra 444 North, he overlooked Extra 436 South. If he had not overlooked Extra 436 South he would have established a meeting point between these trains. He understood the rules required that the movement of opposing extra trains must be protected by train order. He said that there was no condition in the dispatcher's office that caused him to become confused and that the duties required of him were not of sufficient volume to cause him to be overworked.

The manual-block system is used on the line involved for following movements of passenger trains only. The book of operating rules of this railroad contains manual-block rules which provide for the blocking of opposing movements as well as following movements, but these rules are not in effect on the territory involved. If an adequate block system had been in use on the line involved, this accident would not have occurred.

#### Cause

It is found that this accident was caused by lack of authority of two opposing extra trains.

#### Recommendation

It is recommended that the Seaboard Air Line Railway Company establish an adequate block-signal system on the line involved in this accident.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this fourteenth day of July, 1942.

By the Commission, Commissioner Patterson.

(SEAL)

W. P. BARTEL,  
Secretary.