

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY CONCERNING AN
ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE VIRGINIAN RAILWAY AT
AMIGO, WEST VA., ON SEPTEMBER 8, 1933.

January 12, 1934

To the Commission:

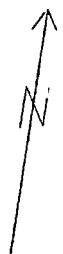
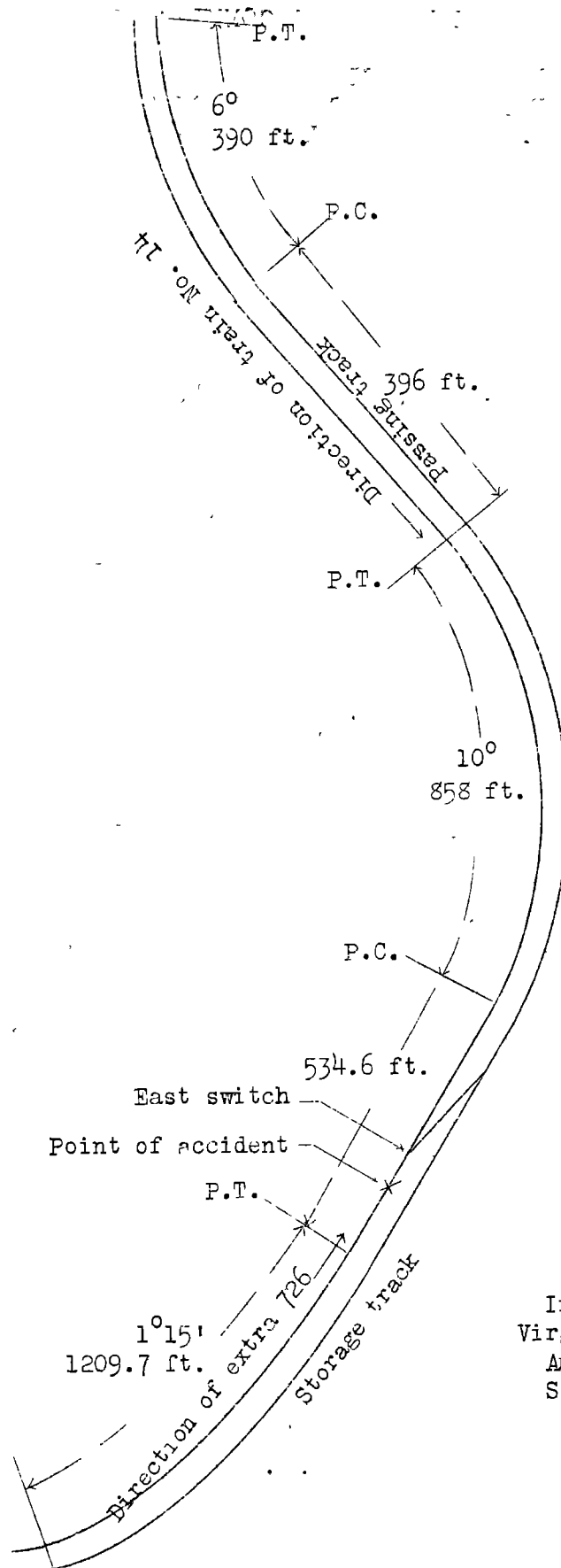
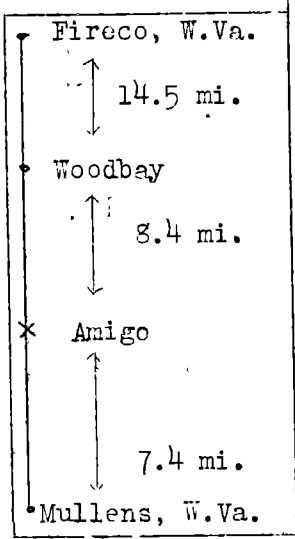
On September 8, 1933, there was a head-end collision between a passenger train and a freight train on the Virginian Railway at Amigo, W. Va., which resulted in the death of 1 employee, and the injury of 3 passengers, 2 mail clerks, 1 express messenger, and 5 employees.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Fifth Sub-Division of the New River Division, which extends between Mullens and Fireco, W. Va., a distance of 30.3 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. The passing track at Amigo is 6,448 feet in length and parallels the main track on the south, with the east switch 5,804.5 feet from the station, and the accident occurred 66 feet east of this switch. Approaching this point from the west, beginning at the station, there is a series of sharp curves and short tangents, followed by a 10° curve to the right 858 feet in length and then tangent track for a distance of 534.6 feet, the accident occurring on this tangent at a point 286.8 feet from its western end. Approaching from the east, there is a compound curve to the left 1,209.7 feet in length, the maximum curvature of which is $1^{\circ} 15'$, followed by the tangent on which the accident occurred. The grade in the vicinity of the point of accident is generally descending for east-bound trains, being 0.56 percent at the point of accident. Owing to a hill on the south side of the track the view of the point of accident from the engineman's side of an east-bound engine is restricted to a distance of 430 feet.

The switchstand at the east passing-track switch is of the no. 17 high Ramapo type and is located on the south side of the track; it is equipped with a banner measuring 14 by 24 inches, which is not displayed when the switch is closed; a switch lamp is mounted on top of the mast, the indication being green when the switch is closed and red when the switch is open.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 11:50 a.m.



Inv. No. 1854
 Virginian Railway
 Amigo, W. Va.
 Sept. 8, 1933

East-bound passenger train no. 14 consisted of 1 combination rail and baggage car and 1 coach, hauled by engine 203, and was in charge of Conductor Scott and Engineman Crotty. This train departed from Fireco, 22.9 miles west of Amigo, at 10:23 a.m., 8 minutes late, and at Woodbay, 8.4 miles from Amigo, the crew received train order no. 38, form 19, directing them to meet extra 726 at Amigo. Train no. 14 stopped at Amigo station, where the middle copy of order was received, and after performing the usual station work it departed at 11:43 a.m., 3 minutes late, ran past the east switch, and collided with extra 726 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 15 miles per hour.

West-bound freight train extra 726 consisted of 30 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 726, and was in charge of Conductor Burton and Engineman Dickenson. At Gulf Junction, 7.6 miles east of Amigo, the crew received train order no. 38, form 19, covering the meet with train no. 14 at Amigo. Extra 726 passed Gulf Junction at 11:25 a.m. and had stopped on the main track at Amigo preparatory to entering the passing track at that point when it was struck by train no. 14.

The front end of each engine was considerably damaged and the tender cistern of engine 203 telescoped the engine cab to some extent; slight damage also was sustained by the passenger equipment. The employee killed was the engineman of train no. 14.

Summary of evidence

Fireman Godfrey, of train no. 14, stated that before leaving Princeton, the initial terminal, the usual brake test was made and a running test was made after leaving that point and the brakes appeared to work perfectly. At the one-mile board approaching Amigo the meeting-point whistle signal was sounded in accordance with the rules, and was acknowledged. The stop at the station was made without difficulty and the middle order was received and read by both himself and the engineman. When the train departed it gained speed rapidly until it was traveling at the rate of 35 or 40 miles per hour, when a light application of the brakes was made. Fireman Godfrey said he told the engineman that he did not see the opposing train, while on the curve to the left, and he then became engaged in breaking coal, after which he asked the engineman if he could see the other train and then the engineman replied in the negative and made a heavy brake-pipe reduction and then lapped the valve; the brakes were held applied around the sharp curve, but after rounding the curve he saw the engineman rise and look out the window; Fireman Godfrey, thinking that the engineman was not going to stop or could not stop, got down in the gangway, jumping off as the train passed the east switch. In the meantime the brakes had been applied in emergency but he did not think an emergency effect had been obtained. He estimated his train was traveling at a speed of

15 miles per hour at the time of the accident. Fireman Godfrey further stated that he had worked with Engineman Crotty approximately 2 years and that on the day of the accident he acted very much different than usual in the way he handled the engine, appearing to be in a highly nervous condition and having to apply the brakes in emergency at several stations in order to avoid running by the station; in fact, the way he handled the air at one point en route made it necessary for him to go to emergency, on sand, in order to avoid colliding with another train, and at one place where the train ran by the usual stopping point he asked the engineman why he could not stop right at the stations, and was given the same answer as on other occasions, to the effect that he (the engineman) was handling the train. Fireman Godfrey also said that the method of braking often followed by Engineman Crotty was to move the brake valve handle to what the engineman called the "light emergency", holding it there for an instant and then going to full emergency, the engineman saying that his purpose was to set the brake so he would not get the "climbing" effect of the cars. The fireman thought that at the point of accident the engineman had previously drawn off too much air and thus was unable to obtain an emergency effect when he wanted it. Fireman Godfrey was quite sure he had talked with a former road foreman of engines some time previously concerning the way in which Engineman Crotty handled the brake valve.

Conductor Scott, of train no. 14, stated that he conversed with Engineman Crotty on two occasions en route and that while he seemed worried he thought that the engineman was in normal condition. At three stations the train ran by the usual stopping points a distance of not more than one car length; he thought this was due to approaching the stations too fast in an effort to make up time. After leaving the station at Amigo and upon reaching a point about 35 or 40 car lengths from the east switch, the train was traveling at a speed of between 30 and 35 miles per hour and he remarked to the brakeman that the speed was excessive. Becoming uneasy he reached for the emergency cord but before he could pull it a service application of the brakes was made. He did not know whether the brakes were later released or whether there was a subsequent emergency application but said the speed was materially reduced and he judged that the train was traveling about 15 miles per hour at the time of the accident. It was his opinion that the engineman had not forgotten the meet order but had misjudged the distance in stopping his train.

Brakeman Allen, of train no. 14, stated that he talked with the engineman at Princeton before starting the trip and noticed nothing unusual about his condition, and while the train ran by some of the stations and stopped short of others, he said this was not an unusual occurrence with Engineman Crotty and he did not pay much attention to the operation of the train until it was approaching the meeting point. He felt a service application

of the brakes while the train was traveling between 35 and 45 miles per hour, which at first did not seem to reduce the speed of the train to any extent, but he still thought the engineman intended to make a further reduction and at the time supposed he had ample distance within which to stop.

Engineman Dickenson, of extra 726, stated that his train slowly came to a stop about two or three car lengths from the east switch. Soon afterwards he heard a train approaching and saw train no. 14 coming into view around the curve. He could not estimate the speed of that train at the time and did not notice whether it was working steam, but from the speed it was traveling he knew that a collision was inevitable; he reversed his engine and opened the throttle in an effort to back away and lessen the impact, but could not say whether the train had started to move before the accident occurred although the conductor later informed him that it moved a distance of about 8 feet. He estimated the speed of train no. 14 at the time of the accident at 20 miles per hour.

Fireman Hall, of extra 726, stated that when the engineman shouted a warning he looked ahead from the left side of the gangway and saw train no. 14 only a short distance away, with the engine working steam, and from the exhaust when he first heard it he thought it was traveling about 35 or 40 miles per hour. He had seen Engineman Crotty stop at stations and had never noticed anything wrong with the way in which he handled his train.

Conductor Burton, of extra 726, was riding in the caboose when the train stopped, not more than 1 minute before the collision occurred. He immediately went forward and as soon as possible he looked into the cab of engine 203 and saw that the reverse lever was in reverse position, with the throttle open and the brake valve in lap position; he was the first man to board the engine after the steam had died down.

Wreck Master Craig arrived at the scene of accident about 12.25 p.m., and upon examining the brakes he found them applied on the baggage car but not on the coach. Upon further examination of the latter car he found a brake lever broken, with a flaw in the metal at the point where the fracture occurred.

Chief Car Inspector Forbes said it was an old flaw of small size and the balance of the metal indicated a fresh break; he did not think the flaw could have been discovered by ordinary inspection and in his opinion the lever broke as a result of the impact, although he said it could have been broken by an emergency application of the brakes.

Road Foreman of Engines and Assistant Trainmaster Akers keeps no record of the dates he rides trains except when he sees a violation of the rules or some other irregularity. The last time he rode train no. 14 was 3 or 4 weeks prior to the accident and so far as he could determine, Engineman Crotty handled the train in a proper manner at that time; he thought he had ridden this train 10 or 12 times since July 1, and when questioned in connection with statements made by members of the crew that the engineman had been making erratic station stops for a long period of time, he said that if this was the case they occurred when he was not on the train.

Trainmaster Pedneau stated that he also did not keep a record of dates he rode particular trains, but as well as he could remember he rode train no. 14 at least six times since July 1, the last time being about August 18, and at no time did he observe Engineman Crotty making station stops by using an emergency application of the brakes.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of Engineman Crotty, of train no. 14, properly to control the speed of his train when approaching a meeting point.

The evidence indicates that Engineman Crotty had read the meet order, and that the regular meeting-point signals were exchanged while approaching Amigo. After leaving the station at Amigo, however, the train attained an estimated speed of from 35 to 45 miles per hour before the engineman applied the brakes, and he then allowed the train to approach the passing track switch at a rate of speed which was too high to enable him to stop short of the passing track switch when he finally tried to do so.

The evidence is to the effect that Engineman Crotty had been operating the brakes and handling his train in a very irregular manner for a considerable period of time; Road Foreman of Engines Akers and Trainmaster Pedneau had noticed nothing unusual when they were riding on trains being operated by him, but it appears that proper supervision should have discovered and led to a correction of these irregular practices before they resulted in an accident. The evidence also indicated that the engineman appeared to be worried or more nervous than usual on the day of the accident and ran by several stations in spite of emergency applications of the brakes, due either to misjudgment of speed and distance or to failure to manipulate the brake valve properly; in fact, the evidence raises a question as to whether he was in full possession of his faculties. He was about 55 years of age and had not been examined on the air brake rules since his promotion in 1912, subsequent examinations not being customary on this railway unless some special occasion arises.

Respectfully submitted,
W. P. BORLAND,
Director.