INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

WASHINGTON

INVESTIGATION NO. 2775

THE VIRGINIAN RAILWAY COMPANY

REPORT IN RE ACCIDENT

AT ROANOKE, VA., ON

FEBRUARY 13, 1944

SUMMARY

Railroad:	Virginian	
Date:	February 13, 1944	
Location:	Roanoke, Va.	
Kind of accident:	Head-end collision	
Trains involved:	Freight	: Engine and cars
Train numbers:	Extra 107 East	:
Engine numbers:	107	: 2
Consist:	81 cars, caboose	: 6 cars
Speed:	10 m. p. h.	: 8 m. p. h.
Operation:	Timetable and train orders; yard limits	
Track:	Single; 8°10' curve; 0.20 percent descending grade eastward	
Weather:	Clear	
Time:	3:08 p. m.	
Casualties:	1 killed; 2 injured	
Cause:	Failure properly to control speed of both movements within yard limits	

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

INVESTIGATION NO. 2775

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

THE VIRGINIAN RAILWAY COMPANY

March 17, 1944.

Accident at Roanoke, Va., on February 13, 1944, caused by failure properly to control the speed of both movements within yard limits.

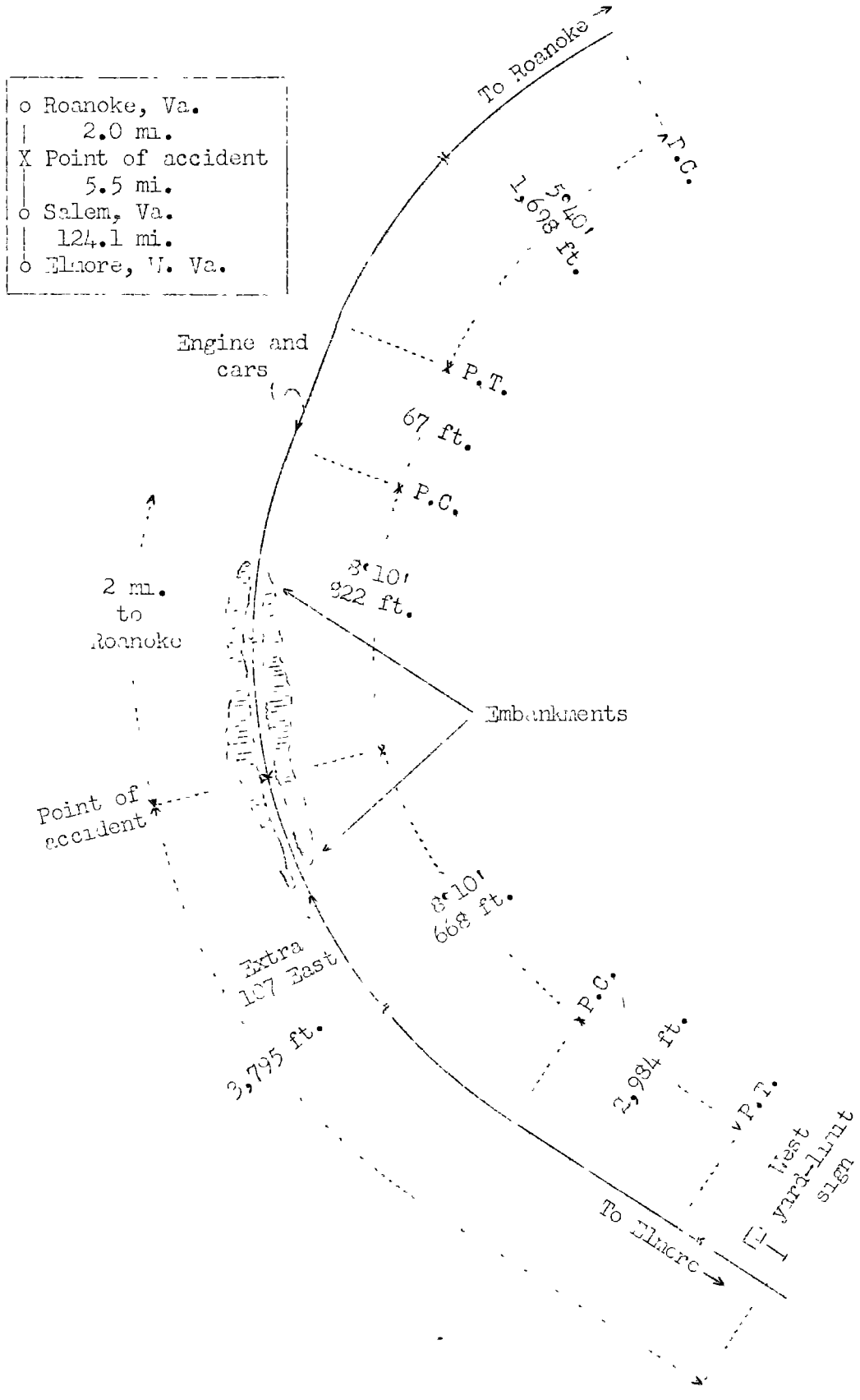
REPORT OF THE COMMISSION[1]

PATTERSON, Chairman:

On February 13, 1944, there was a head-end collision between a freight train and an engine with cars on the Virginian Railway at Roanoke, Va., which resulted in the death of one employee and the injury of two employees.

---

[1]Under authority of section 17 (2) of the Interstate Commerce Act the above-entitled proceeding was referred by the Commission to Chairman Patterson for consideration and disposition.



Inv. No. 2775
Virginian Railway
Roanoke, Va.
February 13, 1944

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the New River Division designated as the Third Sub-Division and extending between Elmore, W. Va., and Roanoke, Va., 131.6 miles. The line was equipped with an overhead catenary system for the electric propulsion of trains. In the vicinity of the point of accident this was a single-track line, within yard limits, over which trains were operated by timetable and train orders. There was no block system in use. The accident occurred on the main track 2 miles west of the station at Roanoke and 3,795 feet east of the west yard-limit sign. From the west there was a tangent 2,984 feet in length, which was followed by an 8°10' curve to the left 668 feet to the point of accident and 822 feet beyond. From the east there were, in succession, a 5°40' curve to the left 1,698 feet in length, a tangent 67 feet and the curve on which the accident occurred. The grade for east-bound trains was 0.20 percent descending.

DEFINITIONS

* * *

Yard Speed.--A speed that will permit stopping within one-half the range of vision.

Operating rules read in part as follows:

93. Within yard limits the main track may be used without protecting against third class, extra trains and engines.

Third class, extra trains and engines must move within yard limits at yard speed unless the main track is known to be clear.

103. When cars are pushed by an engine, and the conditions require, a trainman must take a conspicuous position on the leading car * * *.

Description of Accident

Extra 107 East, an east-bound freight train, consisting of electric engine 107, of the three-unit type, 81 cars and a caboose, passed Salem, 7.5 miles west of Roanoke and the last open office, at 2:58 p. m., passed the west yard-limit sign at Roanoke, and while moving at a speed of about 10 miles per hour it collided with an engine with a cut of cars at a point 3,795 feet east of the west yard-limit sign.

Yard engine 2, a steam engine, headed westward, pushing two cars and pulling four cars, entered the main track in the

vicinity of the station at Roanoke and was en route to industry tracks located about 2.2 miles west of the station. While moving at a speed of about 8 miles per hour it collided with Extra 107 East.

Engine 107 stopped upright, in line with the track and about 100 feet east of the point of collision. The first and second units of the engine were damaged. Engine 2 and the two cars in front of it were derailed and damaged.

From an engine moving in either direction in the vicinity of the point where the accident occurred, the view of an engine approaching from the opposite direction was restricted to a distance of about 300 feet, because of an embankment on the inside of the curve.

It was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at 3:08 p. m.

The engineer of engine 2 was killed. The fireman and a brakeman of engine 2 were injured.

Discussion

The rules of this carrier governing operation within yard limits provide that third class, extra trains and engines must be operated in such manner that they can be stopped within a distance of one-half the range of vision. All surviving employees concerned so understood.

Extra 107 East and yard engine 2 were moving within yard limits when the collision occurred. Under the rules, each movement was required to be operated in such manner that it could be stopped short of a train or an obstruction. However, both were moving when the collision occurred.

As Extra 107 East was approaching the point where the accident occurred the speed was about 10 miles per hour. The enginemen were maintaining a lookout ahead from the control compartment of the first unit of the electric engine. When the engine reached a point about 3,500 feet east of the west yard-limit sign they saw the first car of the cars ahead of engine 2. The engineer immediately moved the brake valve to emergency position, but the accident occurred before the brakes became effective.

About 1 hour prior to the occurrence of the accident the train dispatcher sent a message to the yardmaster which included information that Extra 107 East was expected to arrive at Roanoke about 3:30 p. m. This information was given to the conductor of yard engine 2 by the yardmaster. The conductor instructed his crew that the engine and the six cars would proceed westward on the main track to the industry-track switch, aproximately 2.2 miles. He thought the movement would be into

clear on the industry track before Extra 107 passed the west yard-limit sign. Yard engine 2 was moving at a speed of about 8 miles per hour when the conductor and a brakeman, who were maintaining a lookout ahead from the front end of the first car, saw Extra 107 approaching about 300 feet distant. They immediately gave stop signals, but the collision occurred before the movement was stopped. It could not be determined when the engineer of engine 2 first became aware of anything being wrong, as he was killed in the accident.

Under the Safety Appliance Acts all trains are required to be equipped with power brakes and controlled by them. The Commission's order of June 6, 1910, provides that whenever, as required by the safety appliance act as amended March 2, 1903, any train is operated with power or train brakes, not less than 85 percent of the cars of such train shall have their brakes used and operated by the engineer of the locomotive drawing such train, and all power-brake cars in every such train which are associated together with the 85 percent shall have their brakes so used and operated. The investigation disclosed that engine 2 and the six cars coupled to it were equipped with operative air brakes, and that appliances were provided for the operation of the train air-brake system. However, the air-brake equipment of the cars associated with the engine was not in use for controlling the movement. The carrier had issued no instruction requiring the use of air brakes on cars hauled by engines in movements on the main track within yard limits in this territory, and it had been the practice for such movements to be made without the use of air brakes on the cars. In the present case, if the air brakes of the cars associated with those of engine 2 and tender had been in use, the movement could have been stopped before the collision occurred. The movement of trains without the use and operation of at least 85 percent of its power brakes is in violation of the Safety Appliance law.

Cause

It is found that this accident was caused by failure properly to control the speed of both movements within yard limits.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this seventeenth day of March, 1944.

By the Commission, Chairman Patterson.

W. P. BARTEL,
Secretary.

(SEAL)