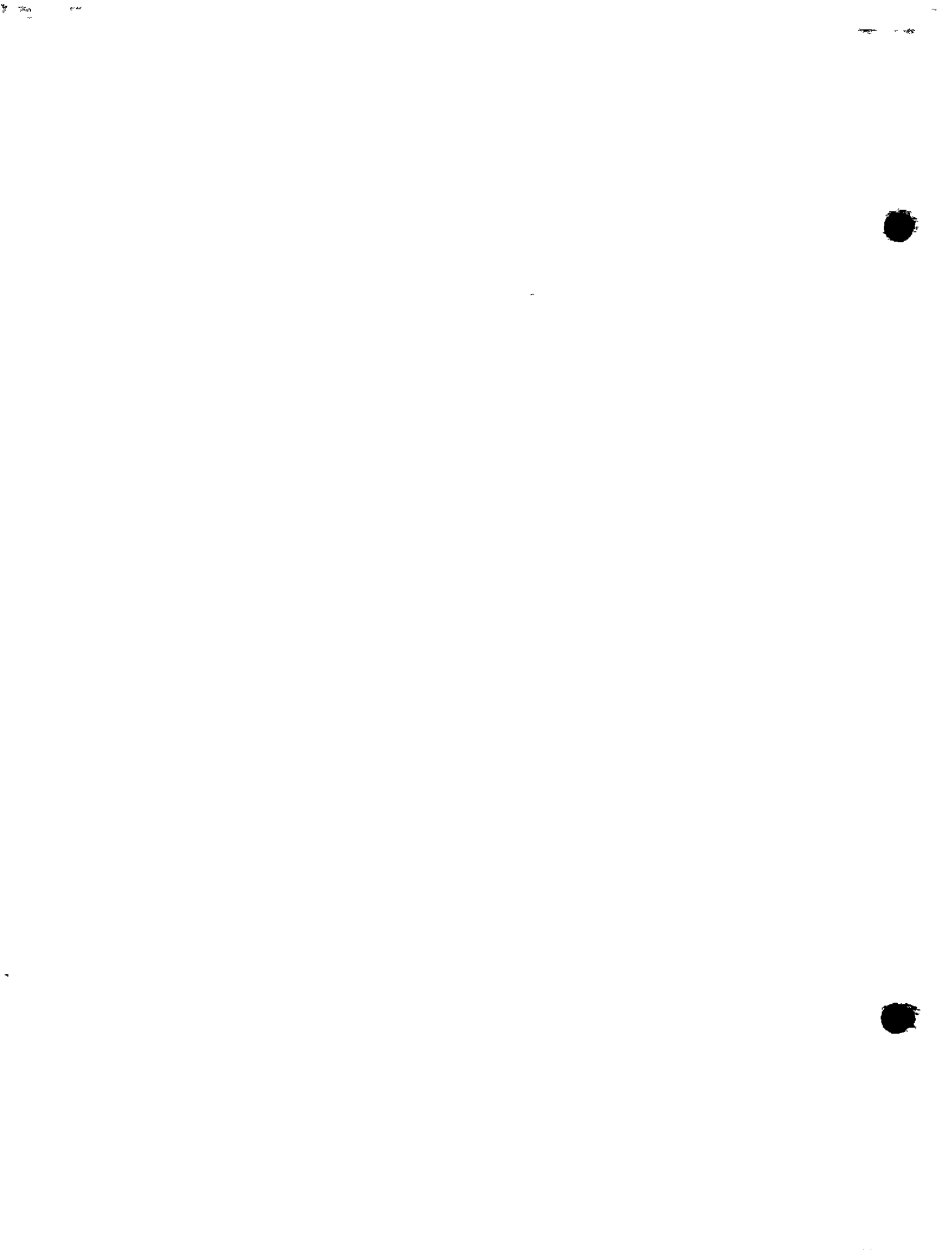


BUREAU OF SAFETY

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REPORT NO. 1970

|                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| Railroad:         | Virginian                              |
| Date:             | February 25, 1935.                     |
| Location:         | Wriston, W. Va.                        |
| Kind of accident: | Head-end collision                     |
| Trains involved:  | Two freights                           |
| Casualties:       | Nine injured                           |
| Cause:            | Operator failed to deliver meet order. |



1970

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY CONCERNING AN  
ACCIDENT ON THE VIRGINIAN RAILWAY NEAR WRISTON, W. VA.,  
ON FEBRUARY 25, 1935.

April 1, 1935.

To the Commission

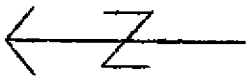
On February 25, 1935, there was a head-end collision between two freight trains on the Virginian Railway near Wriston, W. Va., which resulted in the injury of nine employees.

Location and method of operation

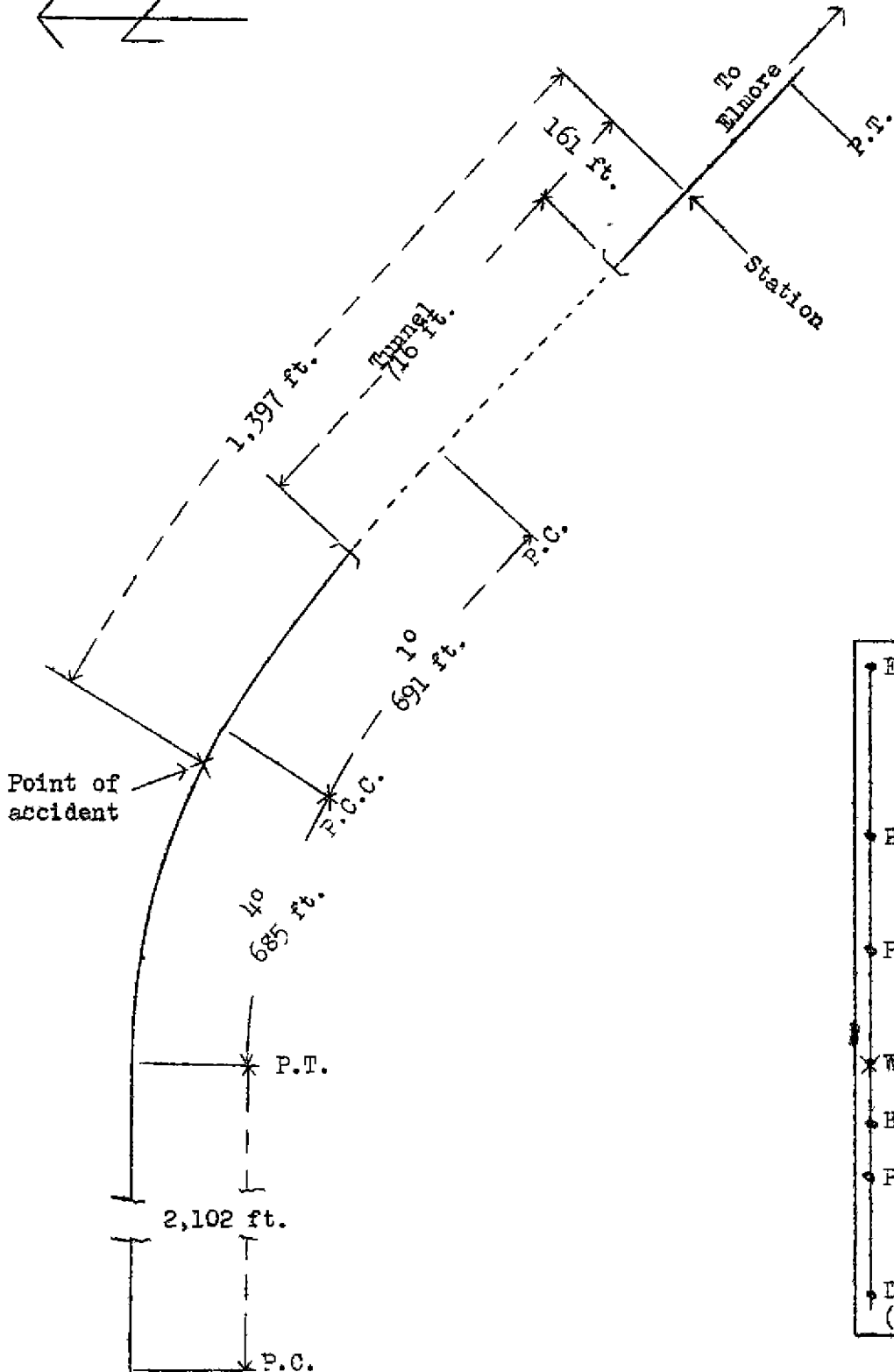
This accident occurred on the Fourth Sub-division of the New River Division, which extends between DB Tower and Elmore, W. Va., a distance of 60.3 miles, in the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time table and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. This accident occurred about 1,397 feet west of Wriston station; approaching this point from the east, the track is tangent for a distance of 941.2 feet, followed by a 1° curve to the left 390.8 feet in length and then a 4° curve to the left 685 feet in length, the accident occurring on the 4° portion of the curve at a point 78 feet from its eastern end. Approaching from the west, tangent track extends a distance of 2,101.7 feet to the curve on which the accident occurred. The grade is generally descending for west-bound trains, being 1.842 percent at the point of accident.

Beginning 161 feet west of the station, there is a tunnel which extends westward a distance of 715.8 feet, or to within 520 feet of the point of accident. On account of this tunnel, and also on account of a rock cut on the inside of the curve, the point of accident can not be seen until it is only 520 feet distant.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 8:05 a.m.



Inv. No. 1970  
 Virginian Railway  
 Wriston, W. Va.  
 Feb. 25, 1935



|                                |          |
|--------------------------------|----------|
| • Elmore                       |          |
|                                | 25.9 mi. |
| • Harper                       |          |
|                                | 8.5 mi.  |
| • Pax                          |          |
|                                | 12.0 mi. |
| • Wriston                      |          |
|                                | 2.3 mi.  |
| • Hamilton                     |          |
|                                | 3.4 mi.  |
| • Page                         |          |
|                                | 8.2 mi.  |
| • D.B. Tower<br>(W. Deepwater) |          |

Description

Extra 710, a west-bound freight train, consisted of 16 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 710, of the mallet type, and was in charge of Conductor Sanders and Engineman Lambert. At Harper, W. Va., 20.5 miles east of Wriston, the crew of this train received copies of train order 7, form 19, reading as follows:

"No. 66, Eng. 465 meet Extra 710 west at Hamilton and Extra 719 west at Lively.  
No. 66 take siding at Hamilton and Lively."

Hamilton is 2.3 miles west of Wriston. According to the train sheet, Extra 710 left Harper at 7 a.m. and at Pax, 12 miles east of Wriston, a second copy of train order 7 was received. Extra 710 left Pax at 7:17 a.m., passed Oak Hill Junction, 3.4 miles east of Wriston, at 7:59 a.m., according to train sheet, and immediately after passing Wriston it collided with Train No. 66 while running at a speed variously estimated at from 15 to 20 miles per hour.

Train No. 66, an east-bound third-class local freight train, consisted of 4 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 465, and was in charge of Conductor Simmons and Engineman Escue. Before leaving Page, its initial station, 5.7 miles west of Wriston, the crew of this train received train order 9, which was a run-late order on a following passenger train, and train order 10, which afforded protection for the rear of Train No. 66 until 9:30 a.m.; a clearance card also was issued indicating that orders 9 and 10 were all the orders that were to be delivered to the crew, although train order 7, previously quoted, had been addressed to the crew of Train No. 66 at that point on form 19. Train No. 66 left Page at 7:50 a.m. according to the train sheet, passed Hamilton and Wriston, and collided with Extra 710 while running at a speed variously estimated at from 18 to 30 miles per hour.

Engine 710 stopped in an upright position about 160 feet west of the point of accident, with all drivers of the low pressure engine and the two front drivers of the high pressure engine derailed; the low pressure cylinders were broken loose and the engine frame broken in several places. The second car in the train telescoped the first car and demolished it, both cars being derailed but remaining upright on the road bed. Engine 465 stopped at a point 85 feet west of engine 710, or 245 feet west of the point of accident, with the engine track and front extension of the frame destroyed and the fire box buckled; the caboose was knocked off center. The employees injured were the engineman, fireman, conductor and three brakemen of Train No. 66, and a car inspector riding in the caboose of this train, and the engineman and fireman of Extra 710.

### Summary of evidence

Engineman Lambert, of Extra 710, stated that he received order 7, directing him to meet Train No. 66 at Hamilton and also received the middle order at Pax. He had applied the brakes at the western entrance of the tunnel at Wriston and had reduced the speed of his train to between 15 and 20 miles per hour when the fireman and brakeman shouted a warning of danger; he made an emergency application of the brakes but the collision occurred before he saw the approaching train. Fireman Burford, of Extra 710, said he had put on the injector in the tunnel and then was looking at the water glass; when he looked out he saw Train No. 66 immediately ahead and called to the engineman. Head Brakeman Goode, who also was on the left side of the engine, estimated that Train No. 66 was about 150 feet distant when he saw it. Conductor Sanders, who was in the caboose, fixed the time of the accident at 8:05 a.m.

Engineman Escue, of Train No. 66, stated that he received train orders 9 and 10 and checked them with the clearance card prior to departure from Page; the clearance card referred to no other orders. His train was moving about 20 miles per hour when he saw Extra 710 approaching, from 12 to 15 car lengths distant, and he at once snut off steam, applied the brakes in emergency, warned the fireman to jump, and then got off just before the collision occurred.

Conductor Simmons, of Train No. 66, corroborated the statement of Engineman Escue concerning the clearance card and orders received. He also stated that he was putting his bills in order at the agent's desk at Page when the operator put the orders on the table and said "there are your orders". Conductor Simmons finished the bills, and then read the orders and left the office, discussing the contents of the orders with Engineman Escue before departing from Page.

Section Foreman Hamblin, located at Page, stated that he was going to work at Hamilton and wanted to get out ahead of the local. The operator at Page called the dispatcher for a line-up, after which the operator read and delivered to Foreman Hamblin a copy of train order 7, providing for the meet between Train No. 66 and Extra 710 at Hamilton, and then told the dispatcher he had given the foreman a copy of the order; Foreman Hamblin received this order about 7:15 a.m. and then proceeded to Hamilton ahead of Train No. 66. Foreman Hamblin further stated that Conductor Simmons was working on his bills when the operator read the order, and the foreman then turned to the conductor and said he wanted to go ahead of Train No. 66; he did not know whether the conductor had heard the operator read the order. The section foreman also said that the operator

at that time was very busy and had a crew to call for 8:30 a.m.

Operator White, on duty at Page, stated that in addition to his duties as operator, he is required to call crews, handle and deliver U.S. mail to the post office, and to perform certain clerical duties. He handled the mail for Train No. 3, and after reporting to the dispatcher the departure of the train, which was at 7:03 a.m., he obtained line-up for section Foreman Hamblin and read and delivered to the section foreman a copy of train order 7. Operator White then went out and separated the mail, some of which was to go to the post office while the rest was to be placed on another train, and then came back into the office and arranged with the dispatcher to clear Train No. 66 on train orders 9 and 10; this was about 7:15 a.m., and as the dispatcher did not call his attention to train order 7, he overlooked that order and failed to deliver it to Train No. 66. The order hung on a hook above and at the back of the operator's table, and Operator White thought that it might have been obscured by the telephone when he pushed it back after talking with the dispatcher and giving a copy of the order to the section foreman. He felt he could have corrected his error if the dispatcher had checked more carefully with him before authorizing the issuance of the clearance card. Operator White had been employed 17 years by this railway, 11 or 12 years of which had been spent at Page, but he did not recall having read any bulletin requiring operators to enter order numbers upon clearance cards as the orders were copied, he did not follow that practice himself, nor did he know of such a requirement ever having been enforced, he was last examined on the rules in 1920 or 1921.

Dispatcher Richardson, on duty at the time of the accident, stated that he issued train orders 7, 9, and 10 for Train No. 66 at Page and that he cleared the train on orders 9, 10 and 7, instead of having the numbers run in their proper order, this being done about 7:25 a.m., but his book contained no record of the time this clearance was authorized. In describing the conversation with Operator White, Dispatcher Richardson said Operator White called for a clearance for Train No. 66 and he was quite sure the operator called 9 and 10 first; he put down these two numbers and then started checking the train-order book and turned back to train order 7, but while he was reading it to himself, Operator White called the number of that order and the dispatcher then recorded "7" after orders 9 and 10 and told the operator to clear Train No. 66 on orders 7, 9 and 10, also saying that Train No. 66 met one train at Hamilton and another at Lively, and was to take siding. Dispatcher Richardson said Operator White then in the same conversation asked permission for the movement the section foreman wanted to make ahead of Train No. 66, and after this had been arranged the operator said

he would give the section foreman a copy of train order 7 so that he would be sure to understand the situation. The dispatcher could not account for the operator's failure to deliver the order to the crew of Train No. 66 and afterwards delivering a copy of it to the section foreman. Dispatcher Richardson was employed by this railway as a telegrapher and extra dispatcher in 1923; he had heard of a bulletin requiring that order numbers be placed on clearance cards when the orders are copied but did not remember having read it; it was his idea, however, that operators followed this practice, and as a matter of safety he thought it should be done.

Chief Dispatcher Pedneau stated that there was no rule in the book of operating rules pertaining to the time when the order numbers should be placed on the clearance cards, although at some time between 1918 and 1921 bulletin instructions were issued requiring operators to place order numbers on the clearance card immediately after an order was copied.

#### Discussion

The evidence shows that train orders 7, 9 and 10 had been issued for Train No. 66 at Page, but that when clearing this train the operator overlooked train order 7, which provided for a meet with Extra 710 at Wriston; consequently Train No. 66 passed Wriston without stopping and then collided with the opposing extra. Operator White was unable to explain his error unless it resulted from pushing back the telephone in such a way as to obscure the order, which was hanging on a hook above and at the back of his table.

There is conflicting evidence as to just what was said between the operator and the dispatcher at the time the clearance card was issued. The operator stated that he cleared Train No. 66 on orders 9 and 10 and that the dispatcher authorized him to do so without calling his attention to the omission of order 7. The dispatcher stated that the operator called orders 9 and 10, and then order 7, and that this was the reason his record of the clearance showed the numbers in that particular order. The operator said he cleared the train after giving a copy of the order to the section foreman whereas the dispatcher said the train was cleared first but that the entire transaction was covered in one conversation. There was no positive evidence to support the statements of either the operator or the dispatcher.

Prior to the accident here under investigation six other head-end collisions on this division of the Virginian Railway



have been investigated by this Bureau since October 8, 1925. The present accident adds another to the list, and, like most of the others, is of a kind which a block-signal system is intended to prevent. In connection with previous reports attention was called to the need on this line for some form of signal protection with a view to putting a stop to these occurrences; nothing has been done, however, and the result has been that a seventh head-end collision has occurred. The country traversed by the New River Division is mountainous, with steep grades, many curves and rock cuts which very materially interfere with the view of engine crews; the traffic is of considerable proportions, having averaged 15 trains daily during the 30 days prior to the date of this accident.

The investigation indicated that about 15 years ago, bulletin instructions had been issued requiring operators to place order numbers on the clearance card immediately after an order was copied. The operator involved in this accident said he had been at Page 11 or 12 years but did not recall having read such instructions; the dispatcher had heard of them but he also did not recall having read them, and while he thought operators as a matter of practice followed that procedure, Operator White did not do so and said he never had known of such a requirement being enforced.

#### Conclusions

This accident was caused primarily by the failure of Operator White, on duty at Page, to deliver a copy of a meet order.

#### Recommendations

The following recommendation is made:

That a block-signal system be placed in service on this line.

Respectfully submitted,

W. J. PATTERSON,

Director.

