

**RAILROAD ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION**

**Report No 3827**

---

**THE VIRGINIAN RAILWAY COMPANY**

**KUMIS, VA**

**NOVEMBER 20, 1958**

---

**INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION**

**Washington**



## SUMMARY

§§§

DATE	November 20, 1958	
RAILROAD	Virginian	
LOCATION	Kumis, Va	
KIND OF ACCIDENT	Side collision	
TRAINS INVOLVED	Freight	Freight
TRAIN NUMBERS	Extra 128 West	Extra 135 East
LOCOMOTIVE NUMBERS	Electric unit 128	Electric units 135 and 134
CONSISTS	101 cars, caboose	120 cars, caboose
ESTIMATED SPEEDS	6 m p h	33 m p h
TRACK	Single, tangent, level	
WEATHER	Clear	
TIME	4 13 a m	
CASUALTIES	2 injured	
CAUSE	Failure to obey a meet order	

## INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT NO 3827

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

THE VIRGINIAN RAILWAY COMPANY

March 12, 1959

Accident at Kumis, Va , on November 20, 1958, caused by failure to obey a meet order

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION<sup>1</sup>*FREAS, Commissioner*

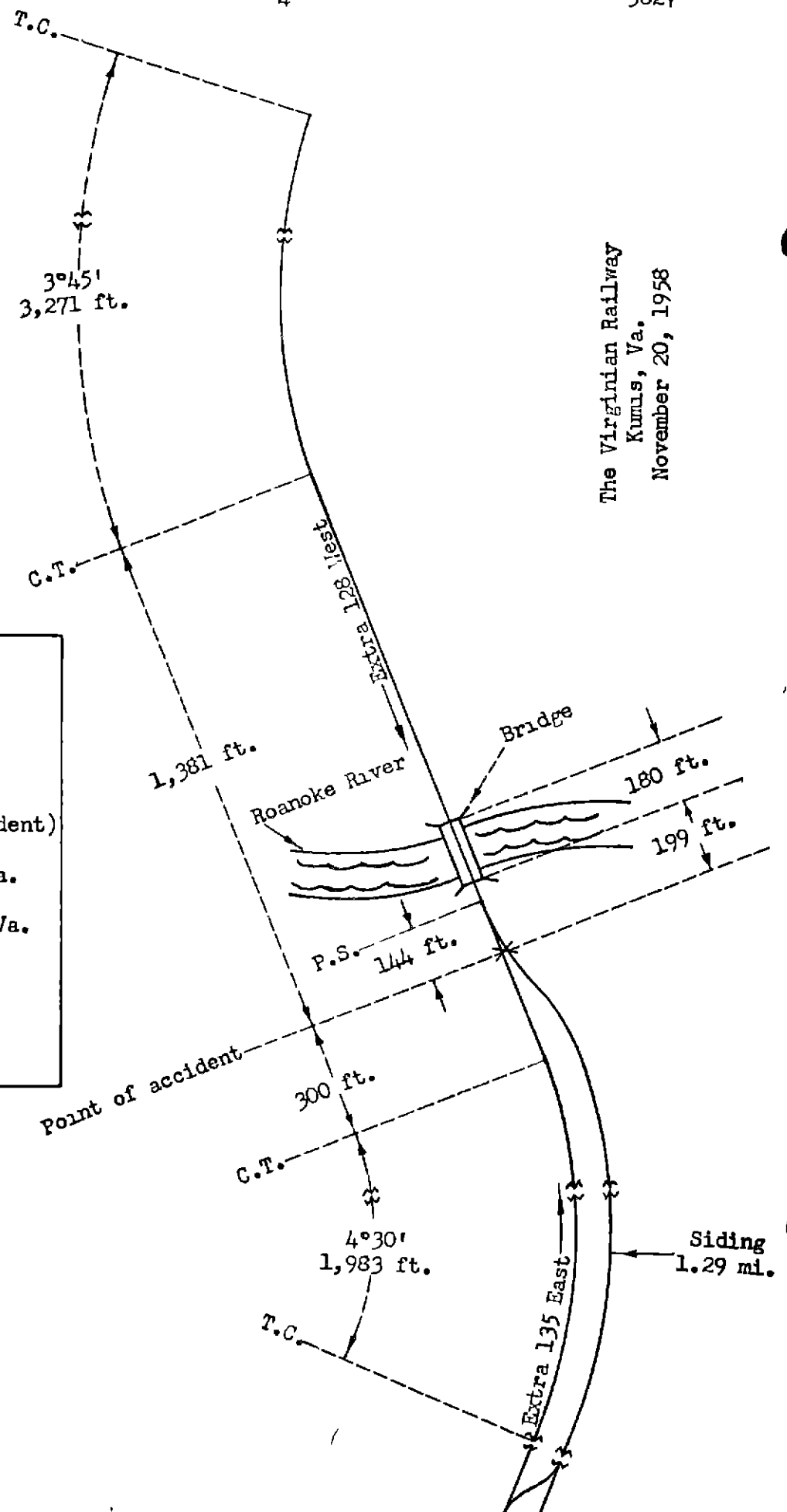
On November 20, 1958, there was a side collision between 2 freight trains on the Virginian Railway at Kumis, Va , which resulted in the injury of 2 train-service employees

---

<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 Freas for consideration and disposition

The Virginian Railway  
Kumus, Va.  
November 20, 1958

- Roanoke, Va. 7.8 mi.
- Salem 5.7 mi.
- Wabun 4.3 mi.
- X Kumus (Point of accident) 26.8 mi.
- Whitethorne, Va. 52.5 mi.
- Princeton, W. Va. 16.0 mi.
- Matoaka 3.7 mi.
- Clarks Gap 14.6 mi.
- Elmore, W. Va.



### Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the New River Division extending between Roanoke, Va., and Elmore, W. Va., 131.4 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. There is no block system in use. A catenary system is provided for the electric propulsion of trains. At Kumis, Va., 17.8 miles west of Roanoke, a siding 1.29 miles in length parallels the main track on the south. The station point at Kumis is located at the east switch of the siding. The accident occurred 144 feet west of the east siding-switch at the fouling point of the siding and the main track. From the west there are, in succession, a 4°30' curve to the left 1,983 feet, and a tangent 300 feet to the point of accident and 1,381 feet eastward. From the east there are, in succession, a 3°45' curve to the left 3,271 feet and the tangent on which the accident occurred. In the immediate vicinity of the point of accident the grade is level.

In the vicinity of the point of accident the main track is laid on a 3-span, open-deck, plate-girder bridge 180 feet in length, which spans the Roanoke River. The west end of the bridge is located 199 feet east of the point of accident. At the time of the accident the river was approximately 155 feet wide and 4 feet deep, and the water level was about 35 feet below the tops of the rails.

This carrier's operating rules read in part as follows:

17 The headlight will be displayed to the front of every train by night. It must be concealed or extinguished when a train turns out to meet another and has stopped clear of main track.

\* \* \*

S-88 At meeting points between extra trains, the train in the inferior time-table direction must take the siding unless otherwise provided.

\* \* \*

204 \* \* \*

Enginemen must show train orders to firemen and when practicable to forward trainmen. Conductors must show train orders when practicable to trainmen.

209 Operators receiving train orders must write them in manifold during transmission. If the requisite numbers of copies cannot be made at one writing, they must make others from the original copy and repeat to the train dispatcher from the new copies each time additional copies are made. They must retain a copy of each train order. The time, complete, and the signature of the operator must be in his handwriting.

211 When a "19" train order has been transmitted, operators must, unless otherwise directed, repeat it at once from the manifold copy, in the succession in which the several offices have been addressed. Each operator receiving the order should observe whether the others repeat correctly. When the order has been repeated correctly by an operator, the response "complete," and the time, with the initials of the Superintendent, will be given by the train dispatcher. The operator receiving this response will then write on each copy the word "complete," the time and his last name in full and personally deliver a copy to each person addressed without taking his signature. \* \* \*

\* \* \*

## FORMS OF TRAIN ORDERS

-A-

## FIXING MEETING POINTS FOR OPPOSING TRAINS

(1) No. 1 meet No. 2 at B

\* \* \*

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.

A general instruction in the carrier's timetable reads as follows:

1. Eastward trains are superior to Westward trains of the same class.

The maximum authorized speed for freight trains in the vicinity of the point of accident is 35 miles per hour.

**Description of Accident**

At Roanoke, the crew of Extra 128 West, a westbound freight train, received among others, copies of train order No. 205, which read in part as follows:

Extra 128 West meet Extra 135 East  
at Kuris \* \* \*

Extra 128 West departed from Roanoke at 7:11 a. m., and stopped at Wabun, 4.3 miles east of Kuris, where switching operations were performed. This train, consisting of electric unit 128, 101 cars, and a caboose, departed from Wabun at 4:00 a. m., and while entering the siding at Kuris at a speed of about 6 miles per hour the eighth car struck Extra 135 East at the fouling point near the east siding-switch and the main track.

Extra 135 East, an eastbound freight train, departed from Elmore at 12:01 a. m. and stopped at Clarks Gap, 99 miles west of Kuris, where switching operations were performed. This train, consisting of electric units 135 and 134, coupled in multiple-unit control, 120 cars, and a caboose, departed from Clarks Gap at 1:12 a. m., passed Whitetorne, the last open office, 26.8 miles west of Kuris, where the members of the crew received copies of train order No. 205, and while moving at an estimated speed of 33 miles per hour it struck Extra 128 West.

The 8th to the 25th cars, inclusive, of Extra 128 West, and the locomotive and the 1st to the 18th cars, inclusive, of Extra 135 East were derailed. The 1st electric unit of Extra 135 East fell from the bridge and stopped in the river on its right side with the front end approximately 310 feet east of the point of accident. The front end and rear end were about 40 feet and 15 feet, respectively, south of the centerline of the main track. The 2nd electric unit stopped upright across the main track with the front end about 590 feet east of the point of accident. The derailed cars stopped in various positions on or near the track structure. The 1st electric unit of Extra 135 East was heavily damaged and the 2nd unit was considerably damaged. Eleven of the derailed cars were destroyed, 17 were heavily damaged, 6 were considerably damaged, and 2 were slightly damaged. The bridge was considerably damaged.

The engineer and the fireman of Extra 135 East were injured.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 4:13 a. m.

### Discussion

Train order No. 205 established Kumis as the meeting point for Extra 128 West and Extra 135 East. Under the provisions of this order Extra 128 West, the inferior train, was required to enter the siding at Kumis at the east switch and clear the main track for Extra 135 East. Extra 135 East was authorized to move eastward on the main track to a point clear of the fouling point of the east siding-switch at Kumis, where it was required to remain until Extra 128 West entered the siding and cleared the main track.

On the day of the accident the train dispatcher transmitted train order No. 205 simultaneously by telephone to the operators at Roanoke, Whitethorne, Princeton, and Matoaka. Princeton and Matoaka are located 79.3 miles and 95.4 miles, respectively, west of Kumis. Each of these operators repeated the order to the train dispatcher and the order was made complete at 2:52 a. m. The train dispatcher and the operators at the other three locations said that the operator at Whitethorne repeated the order correctly. The operator at Whitethorne said that he made the required number of copies of train order No. 205 in manifest at the time the train dispatcher transmitted the order and that he made no other copies. He said that the order he had written corresponded with the order repeated by the other operators.

As Extra 128 West was approaching the point where the accident occurred the engineer, the fireman, and the front brakeman were in the control compartment at the front of the locomotive. The fireman, a qualified engineer, was operating the locomotive. The conductor and the flagman were in the caboose. The brakes of this train had been tested and had functioned properly when used en route. The headlight was lighted brightly. When the train arrived at the east siding-switch at Kumis the front brakeman alighted and lined the switch for entry to the siding. He then boarded the locomotive. As Extra 128 West entered the siding the members of the crew in the control compartment observed the beam of the headlight of Extra 135 East as that train approached at a distance of approximately 1,600 feet. The engineer said he observed that Extra 135 East was moving at such speed that the train could not be stopped short of the fouling point near the east siding-switch and the main track. He immediately instructed the fireman to increase the speed of the train in order to move the locomotive westward as far as possible before the collision occurred. The front brakeman estimated that the speed of Extra 128 West was about 6 miles per hour when the collision occurred. The first the members of the crew in the caboose became aware of anything being wrong was when the brakes became applied in emergency as a result of the collision.

When Extra 135 East passed Whitethorne the enginemen and the members of the crew in the caboose received copies of a clearance form and of one train order, No. 205. The engineer and the fireman read the train order, and the fireman then placed the order on a hook in the control compartment provided for that purpose. The front brakeman, who was in the second electric unit, said that he remained in that unit after the enginemen received train order No. 205 and that he did not read the order. Both the engineer and the fireman said that they discussed the contents of the train order and that it designated Salem, 10.0 miles east of Kumis, as the meeting point for Extra 128 West and Extra 135 East. The conductor and the flagman said that they read and discussed the contents of the train order they received and that the order designated Kumis as the meeting point for these trains. As Extra 135 East was approaching the point where the accident occurred the speed was about 33 miles per hour. The engineer and the fireman were in the control compartment at the front of the locomotive, and the front brakeman was in the second electric unit. The fireman, a qualified engineer, was operating the locomotive. The conductor and the flagman were in the caboose. The brakes of this train had been tested and had functioned properly when used en route. The headlight



was lighted brightly. The engineer said that as the train moved on the curve west of the point of accident he observed the beam of the headlight of Extra 128 West when it was approximately 900 feet distant, and that he called a warning to the fireman. The fireman immediately initiated an emergency application of the brakes but the speed of the train was not materially reduced before the collision occurred. The conductor and the flagman said that because of the speed of the train approaching Kumis they thought that Extra 128 West was in the siding clear of the main track. The flagman said that when the caboose was in the vicinity of the west siding-switch he observed that Extra 128 West was not in the siding. He immediately informed the conductor. The conductor said that the brakes of the train became applied in emergency before he could operate the emergency brake valve in the caboose.

The train-order hook in the control compartment of the first electric unit of Extra 135 East was submerged when the unit fell into the river and the copy of train order No. 205 issued to the enginemen of that train could not be found. The copy of the train order on file at the station at Whitethorne, which designated Kumis as the meeting point for Extra 128 West and Extra 135 East, was compared with the copy issued to the members of the crew in the caboose of Extra 135 East and it was found that they were identical.

It is apparent that the enginemen of Extra 135 East were mistaken, and that the copy of train order No. 205 which they received at Whitethorne designated Kumis as the meeting point for Extra 128 West and 135 East.

#### Cause

This accident was caused by failure to obey a meet order.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this twelfth day of March, 1959.

By the Commission, Commissioner Freas

(SEAL)

HAROLD D. McCOY,

Secretary