

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE ATLANTIC & YADKIN RAILWAY, SOUTHERN RAILWAY LINES EAST, NEAR GREENSBORO, N. C., ON JUNE 7, 1923.

June 27, 1923

To the Commission:

On June 7, 1923, there was a head-end collision between a freight train and a yard engine on the Atlantic & Yadkin Railway, Southern Railway Lines East, near Greensboro, N. C., resulting in the death of two employees

Location and method of operation.

That part of the line on which this accident occurred extends between Mt. Airy and Sanford, N. C., a distance of 130.1 miles, and is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. The accident occurred on the main line, within yard limits, 1,845 feet east of the west yard-limit board at Greensboro, approaching this point from the west the track is tangent for 1,415 feet, followed by a 2-degree curve to the left 950 feet in length, the accident occurring on this curve at a point 430 feet from its western end. The grade is 2.02 per cent descending for eastbound trains from a point west of the west yard-limit board. The view was partly obscured until within approximately 1,300 feet of the point of accident, by material at a gravel plant stored on the inside of the curve. The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 1.20 p. m.

Description.

Southern Railway yard engine 517, in charge of Conductor Bilbro and Engineman Laughan, was backing westward at a speed of about 6 miles an hour, hauling four cars, when extra 348 was observed approaching at an unusual rate of speed, the yard engine was brought to a stop, and just afterwards it was struck by extra 348.

Eastbound freight train extra 348 consisted of nine cars and a caboose, hauled by Southern Railway engine 348, and was in charge of Conductor Bobbett and Engineman Critz. This train left Summerfield, the last open office and 10.2 miles west of Greensboro, at 12.56 p. m., and after having proceeded about 9-3/4 miles, while travelling at a speed estimated to have been between 15 and 20 miles an hour, it collided with yard engine 517.

The force of the impact drove engine 517 backward a distance of about 150 feet, derailing and badly damaging the tender. Engine 348, together with its tender, was derailed to the north and came to rest on its left side, badly damaged; with the exception of the first car, and the forward truck of the second car, none of the remaining equipment in this train was derailed or materially damaged. The employees killed were the engineman of engine 517, and a road supervisor who was riding on engine 348.

Summary of evidence.

On passing the west yard-limit board at Greensboro, the speed of extra 348 was between 10 and 15 miles an hour, and, in view of the descending grade, Engineman Critz made a 20-pound brake-pipe reduction from 70 pounds brake-pipe pressure. He released the brakes at a point about opposite the switch leading to a brick yard track, which switch is 330 feet west of the point of collision, the speed at this time being 10 or 12 miles an hour, and shortly afterwards, when it was about 8 or 10 car lengths distant he saw the yard engine ahead. He then opened the sanders and applied the air brakes in emergency, the speed then being 15 or 18 miles an hour but as there had not been time to recharge fully during the short period that elapsed after the brakes were released, they did not seem to take hold well, and the accident occurred immediately afterwards. Engineman Critz was familiar with the rule regarding the operation of trains within yard limits under full control, and he also knew his view of the point of accident was considerably restricted, and said that had he not released the air brakes as soon as he did, the accident probably would not have occurred.

Fireman Coble said he was riding on the deck of the engine, and looked out and saw yard engine 517 when it was about 12 car lengths distant. He at once called to the engineman and said it was at about this time that the air brakes were applied. He also said there had been a previous application but did not know how many.

Head Brakeman Headen was riding on the deck of the engine on the fireman's side, and said the fireman was the first to see the yard engine, and that the engineman then applied the brakes, he thought the engineman released the brakes from the previous application at about the time it entered the yard limits, and did not notice another application until just before the accident occurred.

Conductor Bobbett, Brakeman Dusenberry, and Flagman Payne were riding in the caboose. The flagman, who was in the cupola, said the air brakes were applied in the vicinity of the yard-limit board and then released, he thought the speed was from 10 to 15 miles an hour at the yard-limit board, and 10 or 12 miles an hour when he saw the yard engine a few car

lengths from his own train. Conductor Bobbett said he heard the brakes released just before the flagman called to him, after which he opened the conductor's valve and found that the train line was empty, there being no exhaust from the valve indicating that the engineman had made an emergency application. He thought the speed was about 10 miles an hour when he looked out and saw the yard engine a few car lengths from his own train.

The first intimation members of the crew of the yard engine had of anything wrong was on seeing extra 348 only a short distance away, approaching at an unusual rate of speed, therefore, the yard engine was brought to a stop and an effort made to reverse the engine, but too late to avert the accident. Conductor Bilbro and Fireman Bowman stated they heard extra 348 sound a back-up whistle signal just prior to the accident.

An inspection made of the cars in extra 348 after the accident disclosed that on one car the brake was cut out, but in other respects the air brake equipment was in good condition. The statements of the employees indicated that they had had no trouble in controlling the train on the various grades en route.

Conclusions.

This accident was caused by the failure of Engineman Critz, of extra 348, to operate his train under proper control within yard limits.

Under the special rules in time-table No. 6, effective April 29, 1923, switching and other engines and trains may work within yard limits without regard to second-class and inferior trains, but must give way immediately upon their approach. Second-class and inferior trains must approach and run through yard limits under full control, expecting to find the main track occupied, responsibility in case of accident resting with the approaching train.

The investigation disclosed that Engineman Critz released the brakes when his train was running at a speed of 10 or 12 miles an hour, on a 2 per cent descending grade, and on a curve where the view of the track ahead was restricted. The yard engine ahead was discovered before there had been sufficient time to recharge the train brake system so as to obtain an effective brake application, and in view of the rate of speed of extra 348, Engineman Critz of that train was unable to stop in time to avert the accident. Had Engineman Critz left the brakes applied a moment or two longer after the first application, he would have been able to see around the curve and would then have discovered the yard engine before his brakes had been released, in which event the accident undoubtedly would have been averted.

All of the employees involved were experienced men. At the time of the accident the crew of extra 348 had been on duty less than 7 hours, and the crew of engine 517 less than 6 hours, previous to which they had been off duty more than 16 hours.

Respectfully submitted,

W P. Borland,

Director.