

## INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN  
RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED  
ON THE BALTIMORE & OHIO RAILROAD NEAR ALTAMONT,  
MD., ON MARCH 2, 1930.

March 24, 1930.

To the Commission:

On March 2, 1930, there was a rear-end collision between a freight train and an express train on the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad near Altamont, Md., which resulted in the injury of four employees.

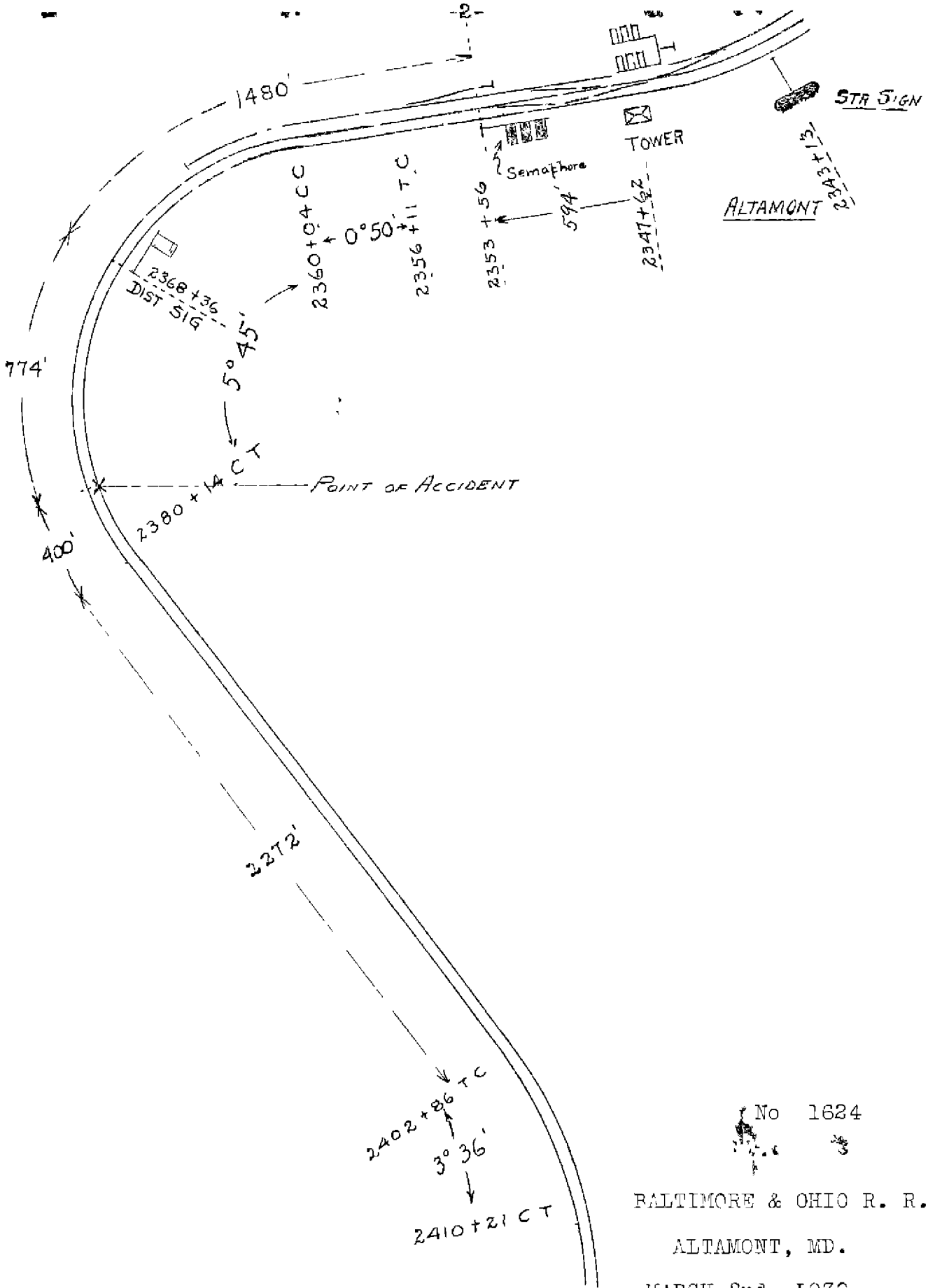
Location and method of operation.

This accident occurred on that part of the Cumberland Division extending between Cumberland, Md., and Grafton, W.Va., a distance of 102.2 miles, in the vicinity of the point of accident this is a double-track line over which trains are operated by time-table, train orders, and a manual block-signal system. The accident occurred at a point 2,848 feet west of the tower at Altamont, approaching this point from the west, there is a  $3^{\circ} 36'$  curve to the left 735 feet in length and then tangent track a distance of 2,272 feet, followed by a compound curve to the right 2,403 feet in length, varying in curvature from  $6^{\circ} 50'$  to  $5^{\circ} 45'$ , the accident occurring on this curve at a point approximately 400 feet from its western end, where the curvature is at its maximum. The grade is approximately 1 per cent ascending for a distance of more than 2 miles, the accident occurring where the grade is 1.04 per cent. Although the accident occurred in a cut, a clear view of the point of accident from trains approaching from the west, under normal weather conditions, can be had for a distance of about one-half mile.

A snowstorm prevailed at the time of the accident, which occurred about 10.37 a.m.

Description.

Eastbound freight train extra 7135 consisted of 51 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 7165, with helper engine 4407 coupled behind the caboose, and was in charge of Conductor Rhodes and Engineman Bailey. This train departed from Mountain Lake Park, 6.1 miles west of Altamont, at 10.01 a.m., and was approaching Altamont at an estimated speed of from 8 to 14 miles per hour when its rear end was struck by extra 4434.



No 1624  
 BALTIMORE & OHIO R. R.  
 ALTAMONT, MD.  
 MARCH 2nd 1932.

Eastbound express train extra 4434 consisted of five express cars, one box car, two express cars, and one coach, in the order named, hauled by engine 4434, and was in charge of Conductor Davis and Engineman Pugh. This train passed Mountain Lake Park at 10.28 a.m., and collided with extra 7165 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 15 and 20 miles per hour.

The rear car in extra 7165 was derailed but remained upright, the caboose was overturned and destroyed by fire, and the helper engine was derailed and came to rest in an upright position, although its tender was overturned. Engine 4434, its tender, and the forward truck of the first car in the express train were also derailed, the engine coming to rest upright, the tender on its side, and the forward end of the first car mounted on the overturned tender. The employees injured were the engineman and fireman of helper engine 4407 and the fireman and flagman of extra 4434.

#### Summary of evidence.

Engineman Bailey, of extra 7165, stated that while his train was approaching Altamont the visibility was very bad, due to the snowstorm and a high wind blowing the snow through the air, and as a result he reduced speed to 8 or 10 miles per hour in order to keep from running by the home signal at that point, which is located about 600 feet west of the tower. As soon as he discovered this signal was displaying a clear indication, at which time his engine was about three or four car-lengths from it, he opened the throttle, and had begun to increase speed when his train was brought to a stop by an emergency application of the brakes, he did not learn until later that a collision had occurred. He looked at his watch about one minute after his train stopped and noted the time to be 10.29 or 10.30 a.m., although when questioned closely concerning the time he was not certain of it.

Fireman Reese, of extra 7165, stated that the engine was not steaming properly, which caused a reduction in speed on the ascending grade to about 8 miles per hour at a point approximately one-half mile west of the point of accident, but the speed was later increased to about 10 miles per hour, at which speed the train was traveling at the time of the accident. On account of the storm, he was unable to distinguish the block signal at Altamont until the engine reached a point about three car-lengths from it.

Head Brakeman Cart, of extra 7165, stated that he was riding about .5 car-lengths from the engine, and that due to intermittent snow squalls he was unable to see either the head end or the rear end of the train. He estimated the speed of the train at the time of the accident at 8 or 10 miles per hour.

Conductor Rhodes, of extra 7165, stated that his train was at Mountain Lake Park about 15 minutes for water and inspection, and that the helper engine was coupled to the rear of the train at that point. An average speed was maintained after departing from Mountain Lake Park until the train started to ascend the grade east of Deer Park, a station 2.8 miles west of Altaont, where speed was reduced, and because of this fact he dropped off a lighted fusee between the caboose and the helper engine and noticed the reflection of this fusee as the pilot of the helper engine passed over it, but did not know whether it was burning after that engine had passed it. This fusee was a five-minute fusee and was dropped off just west of an industrial track switch located 4,440 feet west of the point of accident. The train then started to increase speed and he re-entered the caboose and became engrossed in clerical duties. Just before reaching the point of accident, a westbound train passed and he went to the door for the purpose of giving the crew of that train a proceed signal, but snow and smoke prevented him from seeing any one on the rear of that train. He entered the caboose again, but shortly afterwards he started towards the rear platform with the intention of closing the angle cock on the helper engine, but before he got out of the caboose the air brakes went into emergency and the caboose was overturned. His estimate of the speed was between 12 and 14 miles per hour at the time of the accident. Shortly after getting out of the caboose he noted the time to be 10.35 a.m., which indicated that the accident occurred between 10.30 and 10.35. He said that he did not throw off fusees more frequently as he was of the opinion that the one thrown off west of the point of accident would insure full protection and that it is not his practice to throw off fusees when a train is maintaining an average speed. He also said that it was snowing very hard and that the high wind blew the snow through the air to such an extent that at intervals it entirely obscured vision.

Flagman Arnold, of extra 7165, stated that an average run was made between Mountain Lake Park and Deer Park, but upon reaching a point in the vicinity of the industrial track, east of the latter point, speed was reduced to about 8 miles per hour, after which the speed was increased to about 12 miles per hour, which was maintained until the

accident occurred. While the train was approaching Altamont, he was engaged in turning up retainers, and when he reached a point near the middle of the train he got off and awaited the caboose, but the accident occurred when the caboose was about six car-lengths from him, at which time it was between 10.30 and 10.35 a.m. He said that when he heard the exhaust of another engine besides the helper engine, he looked back, and about the same time the wind momentarily lifted the snow and smoke and he observed the engine of extra 4434 about an engine-length from the helper engine, the collision occurring immediately afterwards.

Engineman O'Donnell, of the helper engine, stated that after leaving Mountain Lake Park the train moved at slightly less than average speed, although a fairly good run was made. The speed of the train had been between 10 and 12 miles per hour, but it gained speed in the vicinity of the industrial track and then reduced to about 8 miles per hour on the curve on which the accident occurred. He said the snow and wind frequently prevented him from seeing the caboose ahead of his engine, and that he could just see it at the time of the accident, he did not see the following train prior to the collision. Neither the rear headlight nor the electric markers on his engine were burning, as he considered that weather conditions rendered them useless. He did not see the reflection of the fusee which the conductor claimed to have dropped off in the center of the track west of the point of accident, as it was impossible to see a fusee under the engine. The statements of Fireman Thrasher, of the helper engine, added no additional facts of importance as he paid no particular attention to the operation of the train due to being engaged in firing practically all of the time between Mountain Lake Park and the point of accident.

Engineman Pugh, of extra 4444, stated that a caution block-signal indication was received at Mountain Lake Park, which he understood required his train to be operated prepared to stop within range of vision. His train did not exceed a speed of 25 miles per hour after passing Deer Park, and when it reached the industrial track, due to his inability to see ahead on account of weather conditions, he placed the throttle in drifting position, reducing the speed to about 15 miles per hour, and this was the speed at which the train was traveling at the time of the collision. He did not close the throttle or apply the brakes prior to the accident, as he did not see the train ahead, although he was keeping a sharp lookout expecting the track to be occupied at any point. Engineman Pugh did not see a burning fusee in the vicinity of the industrial-track switch, and while the wind was blowing snow through the air, which interfered with the view, yet he was of the opinion that had a fusee been burning in that locality the weather con-

ditions would not have prevented him from seeing its reflection. He acknowledged that he was not operating his train in accordance with the rules, and was aware that slow freight trains are operated in the vicinity of the point of accident at speeds of 8 or 10 miles per hour, and admitted that he should have been operating his train at a speed of less than 15 miles per hour in view of the weather conditions.

Fireman Burns, of extra 4434, stated that he observed the block signal at Mountain Lake Park, displaying a caution indication. A speed of from 40 to 45 miles per hour was maintained between that point and Deer Park, but the speed was reduced to about 15 miles per hour in the vicinity of the industrial track east of the latter point. He was riding on his seatbox looking ahead, but did not notice the reflection of a burning fusee and was certain that the weather conditions would not have prevented him from seeing it had one been burning. Fireman Burns did not see the helper engine of extra 7165 before the collision occurred, and estimated the speed of his own train to have been from 15 to 20 miles per hour at the time of the accident. The weather was bad all the way from Mountain Lake Park, and became so severe after passing Deer Park that vision was restricted to about one car-length. Fireman Burns also stated that he became uneasy about the speed of the train after encountering this heavy storm but did not call the engineman's attention to it.

Conductor Davis, of extra 4434, stated that his train entered the block at Mountain Lake Park under a caution signal indication, which required his train to be able to stop within range of vision. The speed was reduced in the vicinity of Deer Park and was gradually reduced still further, until the collision occurred, at which time the train was traveling at about 15 or 16 miles per hour, he felt no application of the brakes prior to the accident, which occurred at 10.38 p.m. The weather was stormy, but it did not interfere materially with the view until after passing Deer Park, and when he got off the train after the accident the visibility was restricted to two or three car-lengths. Conductor Davis further stated that a conductor shares equal responsibility with the engineman in the handling of a train and is required to signal the engineman if he thinks the speed is excessive. He did not do so in this instance, as the speed had been reduced considerably and he did not know how the view was ahead of the train, and he was of the opinion at the time that the train was being operated in a safe manner. There was considerable snow blowing around the rear of the train, where he was riding, but he thought some of it was caused by the momentum of the train.

Flagman Daniels, of extra 4434, stated that a maximum speed of 35 miles per hour was attained after departing from Mountain Lake Park, but after passing Deer Park the speed was reduced to about 15 miles per hour and the train was moving at about the same speed at the time of the accident. After passing Deer Park he noticed that the storm had reached blizzard-like proportions, and in view of the train being operated under a caution-signal indication he thought the speed was excessive, but failed to call this matter to the attention of the conductor. After the accident he went back to flag, but he did not see a burning fusee or find one that had recently burned out.

Fireman Fazenbaker, of westbound train No. 29, stated that between Altamont and Deer Park his train passed the two trains involved in the accident but he did not see any burning fusee between those points. Brakeman Weeks, of train No. 29, stated that he was on the rear platform of his train at the time it passed the two eastbound trains between Altamont and Deer Park but did not see the reflection of a fusee.

Operator Reis, on duty at Altamont, stated that he observed extra 7135 as it approached his station and it appeared to be running at the usual rate of speed for a coal train. He noticed it come to a sudden stop at the home signal, located 594 feet west of the tower, and immediately noted the time on the block sheet, which was 10.37 a.m.

#### Conclusions

This accident was caused by failure to operate under proper control in an occupied block, for which Engineman Pugh, of extra 4434, is responsible.

The rules provide that a train other than a train carrying passengers may be permitted to follow a similar train into a block under a permissive signal, which requires a train to move so it can be stopped within range of vision. Engineman Pugh entered the block at Mountain Lake Park under a permissive signal indication and understood the rules required him to operate his train so that it could be stopped within the range of vision. The evidence indicates that a severe snowstorm was encountered, with a strong wind, which at times completely obscured the view, yet according to Engineman Pugh's own statements he only reduced speed to about 15 miles per hour, although his view was so obscured that he did not have time to shut off steam or apply the brakes. The train sheet, however, indicates that extra 4434 passed Mountain Lake Park, a station more than 6 miles west of Altamont, at 10.28 a.m., and the best evidence is that the accident occurred about 10.37 a.m. These figures indicate that an average speed

of 38 miles per hour was maintained between Mountain Lake Park and the point of accident, and in view of the damage which resulted from the collision, it appears that extra 4434 was traveling at a higher rate of speed at the time of the accident than that estimated by the crew.

According to the statement of Conductor Rhodes, when his train reduced speed west of a switch located 4,440 feet from the point of accident, he dropped a lighted fusee between the caboose and the helper engine, but he did not know whether it was burning after the engine passed over it. The engineman and fireman of the helper engine did not notice it, and the engine crew of extra 4434 stated they saw no indication of this fusee, while the statements of two members of a westbound train which passed just before the accident occurred, and who were in positions to observe a fusee on the eastbound track, were to the effect that they did not see the reflection of a fusee between Altamont and Deer Park. The weight of evidence is against the conductor, but on the other hand there is nothing to prove that the fusee did not go out at once, or that it did not become extinguished in the snow, and there is a possibility that it burned properly but had gone out before extra 4434 reached it.

The employees involved were experienced men, and at the time of the accident none of them had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director.